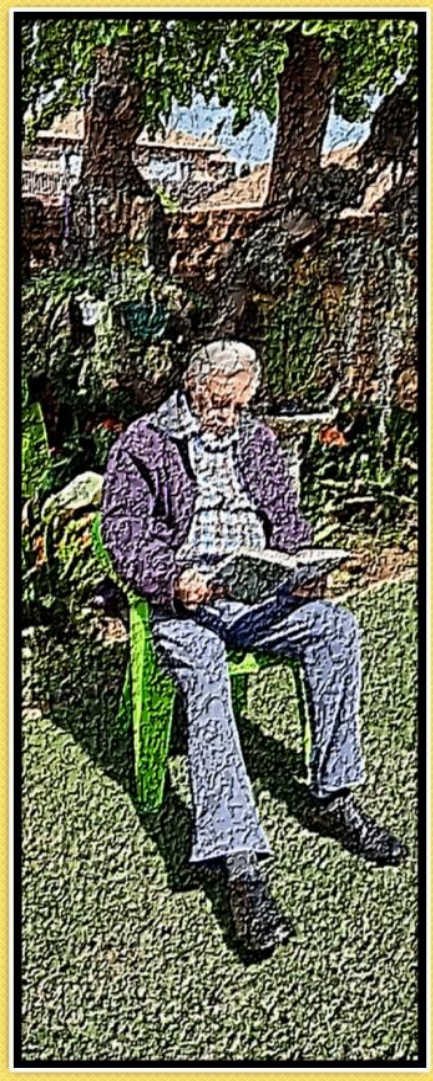
Meditations & Contemplations

STRAIGHT OUT OF JOBURG!



The childhood memories, some hilarious, some sad, of a post-WW2 babyboomer in South Africa as written from a Judeo-Christian cultural perspective

PJ STASSEN

Etricia - Etoile Promotions

DEDICATION

Dedicated to my sister Cornelia for her indefatigable devotion to and care for our parents in the sunset season of their life

"Let no one till his death be called unhappy. Measure not the work until the day's out and the labour done."
Elizabeth Browning
(1806-1861)

THE AUTHOR

Valley View Avenue, Puntans Hill, Durban

(1964)

MEDITATIONS & CONTEMPLATIONS

Straight out of Joburg!

A collection of hilarious (and some serious) stories from my nostalgic post-WW2 baby-boomer life in South Africa as told from an evolving Judeo-Christian cultural perspective

© Copyright 2022 P.J. Stassen
All Rights Reserved

Cover photo: The author
Centurion, South Africa
(2022)

PJ Stassen Centurion South Africa
Meditations & Contemplations: Straight out of Joburg!

ISBN: 978-0-7961-9438-1
(2nd Edition: 24 July 2024)

Requests for information should be addressed to:
P.J. Stassen (E-mail: pjstassen@gmail.com)

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements 7
Foreword 8

1. How Green Was My Valley Too 9
2. Joburg Bullies 22
3. Easy Credit 26
4. In My Father's Shoes 28
5. The Blue Harley-Davidson 33
6. How Not to Buy a Car 34
7. Breakfast in Rhodesia 36
8. That Day at Randfontein Station 43
9. My Friend from Witsieshoek 45
10. Wonderland by Night 50
11. Battle at the 'K.O. Corral' 54
12. Tragedy at Wingfield 63
13. Army Blues 68
14. Nothing Ever Happens Here 72
15. Mr. Jones' Trouble with the Army 76
16. Ode to a Wheelbarrow 79
17. Fish and Chips in Thabazimbi 84
18. The Friendly Puff-Adder 86
19. Winter in Bloemfontein 91
20. Calamity Clowns 94
21. Meet the Champs 99
22. The Croggy Trooper 102
23. My Frenemy the Mouse 105
24. Gardening and Garbage 109
25. The Arachnophobic Husband 112
26. The Great Race 116
27. There is Something About a Mountain 118
28. Radio Theatre: The Story without an Ending 123
29. Rhino Poachers 128
30. The Mother City 131
31. The Obesity Pandemic (Really?) 134
32. The Scourge of Soccer Hooliganism 138
33. Why Cowies Hill is Called 'Cowies Hill' 141
34. Tomatoes & Onions 145
35. The Bizarre World of Social Incongruence 148
36. Honesty is the Best Policy (Or is it?) 151
37. The End of an Era 156
38. Dancing in the Clouds 160

39. Facing the Mighty Gates of Rustenburg 162
40. Herbie's Hernia 167
41. Disappointment at Spitskop 170
42. Beware the Tokoloshe 172
43. Taken for a Ride (Twice) 176
44. The Stopped Clock 179
45. The Great Stamp-Mill Contest 181
46. Humour unto Death 183
47. Join the Club! 188
48. Why We Must Be Born Again 190

Bibliography 197
Photos 198
Author Profile 199

Acknowledgements

Grateful for/to:

1. Bible translations interchangeably consulted:

2. *King James Version* (KJV/KJV+) & *Modern King James Version* (MKJV) unless otherwise indicated e.g., *Young's Literal Translation* (YLT) & *Hebraic Roots Bible* (HRB). The reader may find that, occasionally, I have inserted capitals (in brackets) into Scripture references for the purpose of clarity.

3. E-Sword.net: *The Sword of the Lord with an Electronic Edge (Free Bible Study for the PC).* Online 2021.

4. All the sources, scholars, historical figures and authors I have been allowed to mention, quote or use as examples in the course of writing.

5. Cover design: P.J. Stassen.

6. Cecilia Stassen, for her ongoing assistance, encouragement and invaluable help.

Foreword

A wise person (anonymous) has once said that, if you cannot look back to your youthful life and realise you were an idiot, you're probably still an idiot. Well, I look back to my youthful life and all I see is an idiot, the proverbial 'orang-utan of a husband trying to play a violin'.

Today, in this sophisticated and highly 'technological' age, I often still do the same stupid things I used to do as a youngster during the 1960s; the only difference that it now may take a little longer to accomplish.

So, what is life all about? Don Herold (b. 1889) has said about 'unhappiness' that, *"Unhappiness is not knowing what we want and killing ourselves to get it."* On the other hand, Dennis Prager (b.1948) has said, *"Happiness is not a feeling; it is a moral obligation."* Vance Havner laments the moral decay of society and demise of modesty by saying, *"People used to blush when they were ashamed; these days people are ashamed when they blush.* Samuel Butler (1835-1902) has said, *"Life is the art of drawing sufficient conclusions from insufficient premises."* Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947): *"Life is an offensive, directed against the repetitious mechanisms of the universe."*

On the more upbeat side, Elizabeth Browning (1806-1861) has said: *"Let no one till his death be called unhappy. Measure not the work until the day's out and the labour done."* Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) has said: *"May you live all the days of your life."*

P.J. Stassen
Centurion
South Africa.

August 2022.

References

1. Andrews, Allen (1969) *Quotations for Speakers and Writers.* Newnes Books/Hamlyn Publishing Group Ltd. Feltham, Middlesex, England.
2. Prager, Dennis. *The Dennis Prager Show*. YouTube (Online).

1

How Green Was My Valley Too

Oh! The good times when we were so unhappy.
[Alexandre Dumas, 1803-1870]

INTRODUCTION

One of the most memorable films from my boyhood:

"How Green Was My Valley' is a 1941 drama film directed by John Ford. The film, based on the 1939 Richard Llewellyn novel of the same name, was produced by Darryl F. Zanuck and scripted by Philip Dunne. The movie features Walter Pidgeon, Maureen O'Hara, Anna Lee, Donald Crisp, and Roddy McDowall. It was nominated for ten Academy Awards, famously beating Citizen Kane for Best Picture along with winning Best Director, Best Cinematography, and Best Supporting Actor.

The movie tells of the Morgans, a hard-working Welsh mining family living in the heart of the South Wales Valleys during the 19th century. The story chronicles life in the South Wales coalfields, the loss of that way of life and its effects on the family. The fictional village in the movie is based on Gilfach Goch; Llewellyn spent many summers there visiting his grandfather, and it served as the inspiration for the novel. In 1990, the movie was selected for preservation in the United States National Film Registry of the Library of Congress as being "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant". The Academy Film Archive preserved How Green Was My Valley during 1998."

[Wikipedia].

HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY TOO

Introduction

I first saw this film (i.e., 'How Green Was My Valley') in monochrome black-and-white (nominated for 10 academy awards) in Carletonville, South Africa in 1958 at a local drive-in theatre when I was just about the same age as the age for the 'hero' of our story (the boy depicted by Roddy McDowall).

It was certainly one of the most memorable of my life, and it resonated with me because I could so easily find common cause with the characters in the film. I still have a worn monochrome, VHS-copy of the film in my collection of classic movies and may watch it with friends ever so now and then.

Randgate (South Africa) in 1947

Born in 1947, I grew up on the rich goldfields of South Africa in the small mining 'suburb' of a village called 'Randgate', about an hour's drive from the big bustling city of Johannesburg, the so-called 'City of Gold'.

This little village (Randgate) was born from the 19th century gold-rush as a kind of gateway from rural Transvaal (today 'Gauteng') to the goldfields of the 'Rand' (hence its name, 'Randgate') involving such colourful 19th century tycoons as Cecil John Rhodes (father of the Rhodes Scholarships and who later drifted away from the gold mines of Johannesburg to focus on the diamonds of Kimberley), Barney Barnato, Joseph B. Robinson, Sammy Marks, Sir Abe Bailey, Sir Julius Wernher, Hermann Eckstein, Alfred Beit, Sir Thomas Cullinan and a host of others, at the time known (and bitterly reviled by some) as the 'Randlords'.

Jan Smuts & the 1922 Miners' Strike

This region (i.e. the *East* & *West Rand* of Johannesburg) was also the 'theatre-of-war' for the infamous and bloody gold-miners' strike of 1922 (known as the '1922 Rand Rebellion' or '1922 Rand Revolt') that prime-minister Jan Smuts, at the time, has had to put down with the help of 20 000 troops, artillery, tanks and bomber-aircraft, where planes flying over the town of 'Benoni' (from the Bible meaning 'Son of my Sorrow') for instance were found dropping bombs on suspects guilty of all kinds of illegal union-instigated acts and atrocities cowering below ... probably one of the first of such aviation-initiated innovations in history.

In Fordsburg Square, for instance, the army-bombers, reportedly, once actually missed their target, hitting a church below instead.

J.B. Robinson & the Randfontein Estates Gold Mining Co.

My father's first job probably was in 1940 which entailed the packing and moving around of tomato boxes at a railway station. After the first day's work at his new employer and when his supervisor came around to see him off with a sarcastic, *"I hope this little guy will work a little faster tomorrow!"* my father replied: *"Sir, this little guy won't be here tomorrow!"*

My father subsequently got a job on the train as a steward in the dining car where he eventually was privileged enough to serve dinner to the British playwright, Sir Noel Coward, who was touring South Africa at the time. On my enquiry about the quality of the meals served on trains in those days my father's only commentary was: *"This is critically important ... eat only what you see the chief steward is prepared to eat."*

Later my father worked for years as a shaft-carpenter on some of those mines, and on one of J. B. Robinson's mines, affectionately known as 'Randfontein Estates'. Our school was a stone's throw away from our house, and, from 1957, when in Grade 5 (Standard 3) until we moved away in 1958, I used to wake up every weekday at 6am for school to the sound of the mine's mournful foghorn some distance away (just beyond the new and posh suburb of 'Green Hills') toward the east, announcing the start of the morning shift.

That old foghorn, probably from some derelict ship somewhere, made a gruff and low-pitched (pretty demoralizing) sound, but still better than my mother's whacking, when I was in Grade 1, on the wall of my bedroom with a dessert-spoon (from the adjacent kitchen) signalling the time for me to get up.

Robinson Lake/Randfontein

In those days the management of those Randfontein goldmines had the piping-hot industrial water, which emerged as redundant from the reduction-processes at the mines, siphoned off daily down to a large and exhilarating man-made lake called 'Robinson Lake' (named after J.B. Robinson, the mining tycoon) where the local townsfolk from Randfontein, Randgate,

Westonaria, Krugersdorp, and even from as far away as Johannesburg, Pretoria and the East Rand, converged on Sundays to swim, play and simply a enjoy as a kind of hot-springs resort.

It was immensely popular, crowded and entertained with lively radio music-broadcasts from 'Lourenco Marques Radio' ('L.M. Radio') in Mozambique, compliments of the popular David Davies, Evelyn Martin and others. In those days, i.e., the 1950s, the highlight of our week on the radio was the Sunday-evening (10 p.m.) 'L.M. Radio Top Ten Hit Parade' playing the top selling hit-records of the week.

Although this resort used to draw immense crowds for years from all over as a little poor-man's *French Riviera* of sorts, sadly the lake was eventually closed when harmful amounts of toxic (and lethal) heavy metals from the mine's reduction processes were discovered in the water. All that has remained of this once bustling resort with its merry revellers is a huge, about 500-metres long (and shallow, only a few meters deep) crater where the lake used to be, now overgrown with grasses and reeds, surrounded by trees and some old mine houses still in use.

Riebeeck Lake

Close to our house in Randgate down Sauer Street (about a kilometre away) where we lived in 1960, was another quaint little lake in a forest of about 10 000 square metres, a popular picnic and swimming-resort enclosed within lovely pines, tall eucalyptus-trees and ancient poplars, with these gnarled and stately old trees framing the lake and its surrounds. In fact, my first exposure to swimming as a toddler probably was in that lake ... until it too, during the 1960s, was declared mosquito-infested and unsafe due to the threat of *malaria.*

In 1960, at age 12, I used to slip away at night with our neighbours son, TommyV., to the lake to play in the woods with only the light of the moon as our guide; the highlight of my youth in those days, however, was when I used to go to the woods, for instance, to carve out my name on the bark of some ancient tree ('PS loves LB') during a refreshing drizzle in summer. Those eucalyptus, poplar and pine woods were immensely charming and aromatic when wet, like a scene from some fantasy film, and I could sit for hours (metaphorically speaking) on a wet tree-stump just watching water trickle from trees and running down in interesting little rivulets to collect in streams.

That inscription ('PS loves LB') carved on some tree on the shore of the lake in 1960 won't be found easily (if at all) today; if it is still intelligible, it will probably be ten metres or so up the top of the tree, and probably twenty metres below my father's inscription that he may have carved out when he was a boy playing there during the 1930s. During the 1960s this lake was still a popular picnic resort with families on Saturday afternoons frolicking on the 'village green' on lush green lawns in the shadows of ancient eucalyptus trees.

Today a huge, modern mall graces the 'waterfront' shores of the lake and most of the trees have been harvested, probably as useful timber or firewood and/or to discourage vagrants and root out petty crime. Not long ago a family was accosted in the area, robbed at gunpoint and the little girl shot dead during the altercation with the robbers that followed. Sadly, nothing is as sure and permanent as change.

My father's generation

Incidentally, when he was a boy, my father (PietS. Snr.,) and his friends (BanieB., NaasS., VilletjieV. & PaulF.) used to hang out as some sort of a schoolboy's 'gang' in the region and during the depression years of the 1930s used to play 'Bobbies & Thieves', 'Cowboys & Crooks',

'Blikaspaai' and 'Kennetjie' in the same woods and swam in the same lakes where I later was to play and swim.

They roamed mining's monstrous white sand-dunes (of which one single dump once was declared the biggest man-made mountain in the world) of the Johannesburg Goldfields on the West Rand, that had risen like mushrooms all over the Rand even before the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, attracting fortune-hunters like Mexican marauders in search of some lost 'city of gold', never fully appreciating the true wealth of the reef under their feet:

"The Witwatersrand Basin is a largely underground geological formation which surfaces in the Witwatersrand, South Africa. It holds the world's largest known gold reserves and has produced over 1.5 billion ounces (over 40,000 metric tons), which represents about 50% of all the gold ever mined on earth."

[Wikipedia].

I score a bicycle

When it has been raining, the woods smelled invigorating and almost sacred, i.e., so reminiscent of Paradise; strange, this primordial longing for a home that one has never seen! I once, also in 1960, found a 'Raleigh' sports-cycle there, surreptitiously covered with branches to hide it from view, and probably stolen. It was only later that I realised that I may have been the bicycle-thief instead ... what if, for instance, the bicycle belonged to some hapless, homeless jobseeker who slept in the bush trying to find gainful employment somewhere?

Be that as it may, I, then only twelve years old, rode the Raleigh bicycle all the way to the police station, got my receipt for my deposit (for safekeeping) and, three months later, was notified to come and fetch it as nobody had been there to claim it. I sold that bicycle and bought a big, green 'balloon-tyre' bicycle with the proceeds instead and with which I rode to school every day. Later, I sold that bicycle too to buy myself my very first 'suede jacket' in a fashionable 'burgundy', then (in 1960) so in vogue in South Africa. A neighbour's son, PieterM, had earlier bought himself a nice green suede jacket and I was not going to be outdone by him.

Being only twelve years old in Grade 8 (then Standard 6), however, the jacket was nevertheless still hopelessly too big for me (the last one left in the Jewish store known as 'Zoek's General Dealers') and it only properly fitted me four years later in 1964 after I had turned 16, a great birthday present to myself.

The charm of Jewish & Indian stores

Speaking of a 'Jewish store' ... my childhood was filled with charming images of ancient old stores and shops. In Randgate, and close to our home, for instance, we had one of the most ancient of Jewish corner-shops in the Universe (or so it seemed). This general dealer went by the name of 'Old Simon' (i.e., 'Simon's General Dealer') and he sold groceries and hardware, sweets ('candy') in huge bottles, small farming implements and assorted paraphernalia, feed for livestock and lots of stuff associated with farming, cattle, horses and carriages.

He must have been there since before the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) and clearly was rigged to service the farmers and miners in the area, and probably also the 'Boers' (Afrikaner soldiers fighting the British) on commando during the war.

During the Anglo-Boer War, the Boers (as well as English soldiers, known as 'Khakis') were fond of "commandeering' supplies from little rural shops and businesses in the theatre of war ... all the poor shopkeeper received in lieu of payment was an 'I.O.U' on a piece of paper signed by the officer in charge for the amount owed, for what it was worth.

How many of those promises were honoured after the war would be anybody's guess, but formal reparations (as part of the 'Treaty of Vereeniging' peace deal) were paid by the British government after the war to be disseminated to the decimated Boer population who had suffered, thanks to Lord Kitchener's 'scorched earth' concentration-camp policy, with his farm-burning campaign.

Victor

The shopkeeper Simon's son, Victor, a wild-eyed, bearded and unkempt young man but probably harmless, was sort of mentally disturbed because he used to stand outside in the street all day directing an immense stream of imaginary traffic (and the occasional real car, bicycle or motorcycle) while sometimes also menacingly threatening bystanders and passers-by with a knife.

Once, after I had, without permission or anybody knowing, sent my younger brother HansS. (only 4 years old at the time and barely able to run) to buy me a box of matches during my years as an aspiring pyromaniac, on my mother's account (old Simon knew my mother well and actually gave it to him!), this terrifying man chased him for a quite a distance threatening him with his knife, although, I suspect, his bark was worse than his bite.

This Simon and his wife, both highly respected in the community, were later reportedly both found murdered in their home (an annexe to the shop) by burglars, or, more accurately put, were later found burgled and killed in their home by murderers.

Other stores in the area were 'Zyl's General Dealer' (Jewish); 'Wheatlands Trading Stores' (Indian); 'Bester's Algemene Handelaar'/'General Dealer' (Afrikaner) and 'Elandsvlei Trading Stores' (also Indian and all probably also dating from pre-Anglo-Boer War days) along with the usual plethora of other shops (i.e., butcher, pharmacy, dairy, post office, corner cafes and restaurants) in the little main street. Some of these structures are still standing, bravely weathering the ravishes of time and weather.

The reader will thus forgive me my fascination with these places, most of them so reminiscent of Bosman's *Zwingli's Store* beyond Zeerust near the Botswana border and the legendary *Indian Store at Ramoutsa* in his stories about rural South Africa during the 1920s.

Other businesses in Randgate

A popular place for hanging out was *Wessels' Cafe,* a corner-restaurant built as late as the year 1932 that served meat pie & gravy, bangers & mash, fish & chips, spaghetti-bolognaise and other such 'exotic local delicacies' (!) to the sound of the latest hit on the 'jukebox', for which one had to fork out a whole 'sixpence'. At the time songs like Johnny Ray's *'Just Walking in the Rain'* and Marty Robbins' *'A White Sports Coat'* were, among numerous others, riding the crest of the wave.

'Daan Desimaal' ('Dan Decimal')

Bear in mind that, during 1960 and now being an 'independent republic', South Africa (a former British dominion) was changing its currency from the old English pounds, shillings and pennies to the more user-friendly (decimal) rands & cents system.

To get recalcitrant citizens, however, to enthusiastically buy into the new system, the government then launched a huge propaganda-drive to promote the new currency and to

encourage people to exchange their old currency (probably hidden under mattresses in biscuit-tins and moneyboxes) for the new with a popular little new radio-jingle:

"Daan Desimaal, die Rand-Sent man, gee sente vir pennies net waar hy kan!"

Mechanical translation:
("Dan Decimal, the Rand-Cent man, gives cents for pennies wherever he can!").

School with a social responsibility

During the 1950s when I attended my primary school ('Rapportryer', i.e., 'Despatch Rider') the 'Wessels Café' was also contracted to deliver piping hot fried fish during school hours (in winter) to the school ... the most delicious I had ever tasted. As a so-called 'poor community', our schoolboard had a policy of supplying regular (free) treats daily to pupils year around, e.g., fresh milk in cute little bottles, fried fish, grapes, apples, pears, bananas and oranges, depending on the season.

My father the entrepreneur

Although traditionally a carpenter by trade on the goldmines, my father was also an entrepreneur who used to sell cars from a local auto dealer as well as insurance for the Old Mutual Insurance Co. He later also hawked goods in neighbouring mining-towns on behalf of the two Indian stores for years to supplement his income with.

Thanks to his many business connections (having earned him a good name, in especially the Indian business-community) he later opened a string of retail stores all over the region of the goldfields of the West Rand. His main business-sponsor was a benevolent, legendary Indian business-tycoon by the name of A.I. ('Long One') Laher who used to be very helpful to and supportive of our family.

Before the reader gets the erroneous idea that our lives in Randgate were very stable and idyllic all the time, bear in mind that, in a period of sixteen years, we changed homes in Randgate itself (i.e., without having had to change schools) at least nine times, not counting our many translocations to other towns.

I stand to be corrected, but as far as I can recall we have occupied houses (in Randgate) in Sauer Street; Langerman Street; Lazar Avenue; Smuts Street (Twice: once in our own 'rental' and once when my father was unemployed, and we have had to move in with his brother's family for a few weeks); Botha Street; Stegmann Street and Barend Street (twice).

The house in Barend Street was the only one that was not a 'rental' ... my mother had had it built when my father wasn't looking; during his stormy childhood he had become so used to his own family's nomadic lifestyle that it probably never even occurred to him to buy or build his own house. Bear in mind that, during my father's boyhood and the depression years of the 1930s, he has had to change school over a ten-year period no less than thirty-five times.

The magic of a happy childhood is that one often (thankfully) does not realise that one is 'poor', it was only later when we started riding bicycles through the scenic suburbs of Auckland Park, Parktown, Houghton etc. in Johannesburg that I could learn, through 'value-analysis', to develop an idea what 'great wealth' and 'fabulously rich' meant.

On the higher end of the lower middle-class

We were nevertheless still extremely fortunate, for I was only later to discover how abjectly poor (and far worse off than us) the majority of other South Africans in those days anyway were. In South Africa in those days, if one's father was not a derelict drunk, a chronic alcoholic, a diamond smuggler, a serial philanderer or dead (in WW2) one was considered extremely fortunate.

In a lighter vein, recently, when a well-known (retired) local preacher called NevilleN. once asked his wife whether he had been a 'bad' husband and father, she replied that he had been away from home (and the family) in the field (working) for too long to have had the time to be a 'bad' husband and father (!).

Nevertheless, during the fifties and sixties, goldminers on the goldfields used to be an erratic and unstable species, rich at one moment and paupers at the next. So wealthy were some people working on the mines sometimes that an urban legend used to do the rounds that a goldminer knew that it was time to buy a brand-new car when the ashtray in the lounge (for his cigarettes) was full.

The magic of Vrededorp ('Fietas')

An interesting (but tragic) historical note:

"On 19 February 1896 Vrededorp, Braamfontein, Fordsburg and the Malay Location (later renamed Pageview) were flattened as a result of a huge explosion caused by a locomotive that reversed into two railway trucks that contained 1955 tons of unstable dynamite. This explosion is commonly known as the 'Great Dynamite Explosion'."

[Wikipedia].

A truly busy commercial and cultural gem during the 1940s and 1950s (however, dating from the 1880s) the little shopping-mecca of *Vrededorp* (i.e., 'Town of Peace') and also known as '*Fietas'* (pronounced 'Feetahs', perverted from 'Fitters', for 'Men's Fitters', a reference to the many renowned Indian tailors in the area) is a suburb of *Old Johannesburg* where rows of quaint little Indian and Malay shops, each one painted in a different colour, lined both sides of the main street and where old-fashioned, raucous and ear-splitting tram-rides (On red, double-decker trams), so reminiscent of a Messerschmidt fighter-plane raid by the Nazis, in the track-lined streets were not uncommon.

On Saturdays (at the end of the month) there were the usual 'tickey-bazaars' where everything on display on bazaar-tables (usually out-of-fashion clothing) could be bought for a tickey, i.e., three pennies. As children my little cousin, JeanetteG., and I, (my mother's youngest sister and the same age as I) used to run errands to Vrededorp for my grandmother, where, during the 1950s, we used to sit on the steps of those shopfronts to blow bubble-gum bubbles with the whiff of burning incense from the Indian shops gracing the cool morning air. 'Fietas' was still a magical place then.

Our first Elvis movie

It was also there in 'Fietas' (Vrededorp) where JeanetteG., my brother HansS. and I (during the 1950s) saw our first Elvis-movie, 'King Creole', my first experience with the Elvis-phenomenon and the boisterous, hysterical women drooling over a matinee rock and roll idol.

To put it mildly, the teeny-boppers went completely bonkers, and JeanetteG., or 'Nettie', shocked me (much to my amusement) by taking off her 'kid-gloves' (a comfortable moccasin-type shoe popular in those days) and kissing and hugging it all over its black imitation-leather, a pathetic replacement, in my opinion, for 'the Elvis'.

A memorable moment for both of us was when, in 1950 or 1951, our family took us, as four-year-old toddlers, to see *The Wizard of Oz* at the *Gaiety Theatre* in Braamfontein, Johannesburg, the same theatre where my mother had, for a while during her (WW2-era) teenage years, worked as an usherette when her father was fighting Rommel in the northern desert. Sadly, she, probably my best childhood-friend ever, died during the early 1990s from cancer of the kidneys.

In those days theatres could, should the need for it arise, make theatre-organs rise from a pit in the stage to facilitate plays and music-shows with live entertainers. Two artists to regularly do the rounds (according to my mother) were the popular singing duo, Dawie Couzyn and Doris Brasch, whom she, still a little teeny bopper, detested but whom I later had grown to like from listening to their music from vinyl records over the air.

Until his death in 2013 my father could still recall how, during his childhood in Jeppe (Johannesburg), theatregoers ('bioscope patrons') in South Africa have had to rise and stand at attention for the singing of *'God Save The King/Queen'* at the end of feature films.

My first 'Tarzan' Film

It was in Randfontein where in (about) 1956 I saw my first *Tarzan* movie starring *Lex Barker,* although *Gordon Scott* will always remain my genre-favourite. Bear in mind that my parents were not church-going people, and my cultural and spiritual growth (if any) were limited to the stories from (good and wholesome) movies and the antics of the boyhood heroes (i.e., the film-stars) of the era, as well as from books ... I loved books and comics.

The *Tarzan* and *The Phantom* comic-strips (in daily newspapers were immensely popular in those days, along with e.g., *Dick Tracy*, *Flash Gordon*, *Buck Rogers, King Arthur, Mutt & Jeff, Dagwood & Blondie* and *Peanuts*. Had I collected and saved all the *comics (Superman, Batman, Little Lotta, Little Tubby, Little Dot, Richie Rich, Elmer, Archie, Jughead, Mighty Mouse, Donald Duck, Gyro Gearloose* etc.) we consumed as families in those days, I probably could have sold that collection for a stack today.

Today I am an enthusiastic history-buff, and I can only ascribe it to this exposure to the films, especially about war and westerns, I was subjected to in those days. My father loved to read *Louis L'Amour* and those 'picturesque' *Zane Grey* westerns, a habit that (I believe) had instilled in him a good sense of social ethics and moral values, despite his 'no-church' lifestyle. He especially loved Zane Grey's use of spontaneous prose describing the American wilderness and backwoods during the colonial era.

Defining 'wealth' as a kid

They say that wealth (and poverty) is 'relative', and isn't it ironical how we as children, for instance, drooled at the sight of *Richie Rich's* wealth (in the comics) while other children, much worse off than us, perhaps again drooled at the sight of our wealth of *'Richie Rich'* comics (!) while they probably had nothing more exciting to read except their boring school textbooks.

Nevertheless, while some people in those days (e.g., educationists, teachers, clergymen, theologians etc.) may have scoffed at the idea of the 'decadent' comics, I believe that comics did more to further the cause of *basic English literacy* for Afrikaner kids than many a boring grammar textbook, and I believe that they should be revived to address the illiteracy problem in

our rural areas. Nevertheless, in those days, satirically speaking, one's relative wealth could possibly be guessed as a family standing relative to the number of Richie Rich's comics in the house, as follows:

- 'Fabulously wealthy' / 'Stinking rich': Richie Rich himself
- 'Wealthy': A shelf stacked with all the published Richie Rich comics
- 'Upper middleclass': A drawer with a few worn Richie Rich comics
- 'Lower middleclass': No Richie Rich comics at all / having to borrow the comics from the 'upper middleclass' neighbour.

WE MOVE AWAY

My Father and the Depression Years (1924>)

Recapping again: In those days my father used to be a serial drifter between mines and after better jobs. Born in 1924, he had grown up during the depression and (poverty-stricken) euphoria following the late-nineteenth century gold-rush to Johannesburg; his family was trapped in the sociologist's (and probably the criminologist's too) 1930s worst headache of the time ... the *Afrikaner Armblanke Vraagstuk (the Afrikaner Poor-White Challenge).*

He was thus forever looking out for better pay in the mines, and later, when I complained that I had been plucked from or dumped in (at least) eight new or different schools because of all the moving around the country, he replied: *"I was dumped in and plucked from new and different schools by my parents during my school career too no less than 35 times in 10 years!"*

Later I calculated that, since he probably had left school in 1940 at the age of 16, he, over the span of about 10 years, must have changed schools (on average) *every three to four months ... thirty-five times in all.*

The South African Railways

When my father left school in 1940, he became a steward on the train at the 'SAS & H'. This acronym was *Afrikaans* for the *'South African Railways & Harbours' ('Suid-Afrikaanse Spoorweë & Hawens').* From this peculiar acronym (SAS & H) however, the cynics inferred the standing joke of *'Sit Asseblief Stil & Houvas!' ('Please sit still & hold on tight!').* It was during his tenure as a young steward on the railways that he met and served the British playwright, Sir Noel Coward, in the dining-car of the train, who, during WW2, reportedly was acting as a spy on behalf of the British government albeit travelling under the pretext of a visiting tourist ... local pro-Nazi celebrities like Johannes van der Walt (wrestling) and Robbie Leibbrandt (boxing) were, together with the *Ossewa Brandwag* ('Oxwagon Sentry') at the time kicking up a political stink of considerable dimensions.

Enters Count Dracula: Sir Christopher Lee

During these wild WW2 years, the now legendary (and late) British actor, *Sir Christopher Lee*, apparently was often seen in these parts, where he (as a young and aspiring fighter-pilot for the British) also spent some time in e.g., Cape Town, Durban and later in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) where he served under an Afrikaner air-force officer working for the RAF (Royal Air Force) i.e., a Major Venter, and where he also met General Jan Smuts, to whom he, in his autobiography, *Lord of Misrule*, affectionately refers to as 'Oom Jannie' ('Uncle Jannie').

To illustrate the historical significance of this contact, bear in mind that Sir Christopher Lee was one of the very few people who probably could claim that he had shaken hands with the man (Jan Smuts) who on his part had shaken hands with Paul Kruger, president of the Z.A.R. during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 ... just two handshakes away from the man (Kruger) who had fought as a boy against the mighty Zulu nation at the 'Battle of Blood River'.

Although my father was an Afrikaner speaking the local vernacular of Afrikaans, he had spent most of his childhood in English-medium schools, and, although it must have been a formidable challenge for a frightened little 'Boer child' in those days, it later certainly developed into an enormous blessing put to great linguistic and business advantage by him when he opened up his chain of retail stores all over the place.

Back to where I was born

Nevertheless, we moved back to Randgate in 1960 and then again back to Carletonville in 1964 after a short spell in Virginia in the Orange Free State from 1961-1962 and my own three-month stint at my grandparents' place in Cottesloe, Johannesburg where I went to school in Crosby, Johannesburg to finish my 1961 schoolyear.

This is the same school (i.e., in 1961 'Vorentoe High') where my mother also attended school in 1946 as a teenager and where, many years later, forty of its pupils were drowned when their double-decker school-bus by accident drove with them into the Westdene Dam.

What a privilege it was to, for the first time, during our mandatory 'culture periods' and in a school sporting a strong cosmopolitan, British climate, also be introduced to all those charming Albert Brumley and Stephen Foster type folk songs from America; bear in mind that, much earlier and as Afrikaner kids, our diet of songs included some translations from Britain and America but in reality was eclipsed by the many German type patriotic songs in vogue at the time.

Auckland Park /Cottesloe (1961)

In Auckland Park, and living with my grandparents in Herald Str., Cottesloe, Nettie and I used to catch one of those red double-decker ('London-type') buses each morning at a bus stop opposite the old Con Cowan High School (today incorporated into the University of Johannesburg) to travel to our school in the suburb of Crosby, not far from the almost iconic Cottesloe Mine Hospital where we at an Old Age Home nearby and during one Christmas in a charity for its senior citizens, once spent an afternoon of music and singing with Archie Selenski (pianist) and Virginia Lee, a vivacious, freckled redhead and popular upcoming female country-singer.

My grandparents' house, a stately but somewhat spooky, turn-of-the-century *'Edwardian prefab'* that had served as either a mess-hall for English officers or as a field-hospital during the Anglo-Boer War, was situated not far from the shortest street in Johannesburg, i.e., 'Noddy Street' and in 1961, while waiting for the school-bus to arrive in the early spring-mornings, we used to stand watching in awe as the SABC's (Brixton) broadcasting-tower gradually went up, higher and higher each day. During the 1950s and during the *'Guy Fawkes'* celebrations (in November), Christmas and New Year, we often climbed onto the roof of my grandfather's workshop in his backyard watching the fireworks displays all over the Johannesburg CBD and suburbs. During the Rand Easter Show at Milner Park, the showgrounds beamed those huge army-searchlights kilometres up into the air so reminiscent of 20th Century Fox's iconic introduction to its films; what a gorgeous sight for curious young eyes; in fact, for some time, I erroneously believed that Johannesburg was Hollywood.

The Cullinan and the 'White Waters Ridge'

On 26 January 1905 the world's largest gem-quality diamond ever, i.e., the 'Cullinan' diamond, was found at the Premier Mine at Cullinan, South Africa.

One thing I could never understand, is that, although we were born on some of the richest *('White Waters Ridge')* goldfields in the world, and, although, even as I write, I live only an hour's drive from where the *Cullinan*, the largest gem-quality rough-diamond ever was found ... the majority of South Africans are still struggling to make ends meet. Fraud, corruption and racketeering in government circles as well as in big business have ravished South Africa in recent times, and the only consolation is that only a country rich in natural and mineral wealth could have invited so much pilfering and crime ... poor countries have nothing to steal.

Incidentally, I visited Cecil John Rhodes' legendary diamond-mecca of Kimberley (and the famous *big hole)* only as late as 2012 or so at age of 65, and mind you, only after the late British actor, Sir Peter Ustinov, had visited the place and made such a fuss about it on the television news. The Old City of Kimberley is still there and classic (corrugated-iron, painted in green) houses, shops, including the deep underground mine where Cecil Rhodes had to hide the city's civilians during the Boers' bombardment of the city in the Anglo-Boer War, as well as the iconic *big hole* from the era, are being maintained as a period-museum (perhaps the reason some people refer to South Africa as 'the country with a hole in it').

The Oosthuizen Disaster

The Oosthuizen disaster happened on 3 August 1964 when the entire Oosthuizen family of three in the early hours of the morning disappeared with their home and all their belongings into a monstrous sinkhole, about the size of a block of houses, never to be found again.

There was extensive collateral damage in the area, and the rumble that night could be heard in my bedroom from about five or more kilometres away, although most citizens (myself included) first must have ascribed it to thunder and inclement weather. Today, the inscription on their natural grave (a small memorial) reads: *'God Himself laid them to rest.'*

That was the same year in which the American country and gospel singer, Jim Reeves, died, also a sad loss for South Africans who were very fond of him. Just before his death Reeves has made one film in South Africa, i.e., 'Kimberley Jim' and it probably can still be streamed from the Internet.

The 600km bicycle trip

During the early 1970s my friend GerritV. and I took a leisurely (10-day) bicycle trip to Durban sleeping each night at the wayside just off the road and covering about 600+ kms or so, over the old Amajuba Pass national route.

In Durban we lived for some time with my Aunt Anna and Uncle Johan Zietsman at 21 Valley View Avenue in Puntanshill, (today replaced by a tall block of flats), spent time at Brockley Lodge (in Point Road, not recommended) and even for three days in sleeping bags in the sand on the beachfront at La Lucia (also not recommended) until the bikes started to rust, and we have had to leave.

Coming back some weeks later, while on the way back home from Durban we rained out during a cloudburst at Hillcrest, then spent the night shivering in the waiting room of the Hillcrest

railway station. At about 5am we got onto a train and returned to Carletonville courtesy of the SAR & H ('Please sit still and hold on tight').

A Sad Interview

One of the saddest interviews I have had to experience was during 1998 when we were living in Sinoville (Pretoria); at that stage I was trying my hand at real estate and was listing properties for my firm one morning when I stumbled onto this couple living in a little 2-bedroom townhouse not far from us.

When I entered the home of this elderly couple, the husband was lying on a bed in the lounge, either convalescent or terminally ill ... I never got to ask the reason for his illness. His bed was made to stand in the lounge to facilitate the easy reception of the occasional stream of visitors to his bedside. His wife and a lady, whom I assumed was a friend, a neighbour or a family member, were also sitting there, being perfectly kind and hospitable.

Instead of exchanging details about the property, however, the husband, a big, burly Dutch man (probably Jewish) who must have been a considerable physical specimen at the height of his powers, then took me down an offramp totally unexpected by me by suddenly starting to cry profusely, telling me how he, at 16-years of age during World War 2, has had to flee for his life when the Nazis arrived in Holland to take his family away. During this nightmarish period all the close members of his family were lost, and with not a single member of an extended family left able to take him in, he was helped by the authorities to escape the Nazi scourge and flee to a foreign country, and, at the age of 17, to try and make a living as a young apprentice in South Africa.

Here was this old man, his hair white with the frost of many winters and sobbing uncontrollably like an orphaned child on his bed, overcome with a grief so fresh and overwhelming as if it all had happened the week before. I was so gripped with his condition that I drove home, picked up a book and went back to their home; my farewell gift to him was Corrie Ten Boom's *Tramp for the Lord*. This man's testimony (for which I was so woefully ill-prepared) has left an indelible mark on my psyche, and may the Lord personally dry the tears from his eyes in Eternity.

Now, at the time I was going through a very stressful time in my life; I had lost the guarantee of a regular income, my son was at varsity, my daughter was desperately unhappy in her new school, and, amidst all of this, my wife alone has had to bear the burden of keeping the household afloat with her steady employment at the bank. My interview with this victim of the holocaust thus came at a time when I needed it most: It was as if the LORD wanted to restore my perspective by saying to me, *"Oh, you say you are suffering loss and grief? Let me show you what real loss and grief is like."*

So, on that day I truly saw what real loss and grief was like, i.e., my first (excruciating) encounter with a real-life holocaust survivor. What a superb Educator, this God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The Greatest Blessing

The greatest blessing of my life, besides having had the privilege of making my peace with God in 1962 and accepting Christ as Saviour in 1962, was my family and getting married in 1978 to a wife the Lord had promised me in 1966. Our firstborn was, unfortunately, lost in 1978 as a miscarriage due to our ignorance and the negligence of an inexperienced young doctor; our a second (son) is a successful projects manager with a large multinational mining company and our multilingual daughter an accomplished missionary and indefatigable spiritual leader (Evangelical Christianity) in Belgium.

My son and his wife are also running a school of music of some considerable local repute and our idea of heaven-on-earth is when the four grandkids come to visit, and they all try to talk at the same time (glorious chaos). My father, mother and two of my brothers have already been buried; one of my brothers (Thys) lives in Sydney, Australia and my sister Cornelia and youngest brother Deon are all that I have left of my siblings in South Africa.

References

1. Reitz, Deneys (1929) *Commando: A Boer Journal of the Boer War*.
2. SAHO (2018) *History of Fietas.*
3. Wikipedia (2018) *Afrikaans.* Online 2022.
4. Wikipedia (2018) *Blyvooruitzicht & Oosthuizen-Family Sinkhole.* Online 2022.
5. Wikipedia (2018) *Bushveld.* Online 2022.
6. Wikipedia (2018) *Cullinan Diamond.* Online 2022.
7. Wikipedia (2018) *Herman Charles Bosman.* Online 2022.
8. Wikipedia (2018) *How Green Was My Valley (Film).* Online 2022.
9. Wikipedia (2018) *Johannesburg*. Online 2022.
10. Wikipedia (2018) *Just as I Am (Hymn).* Online 2022.
11. Wikipedia (2018) *Randfontein: Randgate*. Online 2022.
12. Wikipedia (2018) *Randlord*. Online 2022.
13. Wikipedia (2018) *Thabazimbi.* Online 2022.
14. Wikipedia (2018) *The Wizard of Oz.* Online 2022.
15. Wikipedia (2018) *Vrededorp (Gauteng).* Online 2022.
16. Wikipedia (2018) *Witwatersrand Basin.* Online 2022.

2

Joburg Bullies

Power admits no equal and dismisses friendship for flattery.
[Edward Moore, 1712-1757].

During its heyday Joburg (Johannesburg, founded on gold, used to be, among others, also a city of bullies. I have already earlier mentioned how we, as kids, have had to run from local street-gangs brandishing airguns, bicycle-chains and baseball-bats at the Brixton hills near Vrededorp ('Fietas').

But Joburg also had its upside. It was here where I first had gotten acquainted with big city life ... in fact, when I was little, I used to think that Joburg was Hollywood. The reader will probably excuse me for this glaring error once he had heard how attractive a city Joburg in those days could be, especially at night during *Guy Fawkes*, *Christmas* and *New Year*. During these festivities the giant WW2 type searchlights, probably borrowed from the military, used to throw its beams, in the early evening, about 30 kilometres against the cumulus clouds high up in the sky, creating a spectacle of light above the chain of hills upon which Joburg was founded no child of the forties and fifties would ever forget.

Bear in mind that it was in the aftermath of World War 2, thus a general spirit of optimism and celebration pervaded the air all over the country. The festivities were usually directed from Milner Park, named after the British envoy in South Africa during the Anglo-Boer War, Lord Alfred Milner, not far from my grandparents' home in Cottesloe. We used to clamber onto the roof of my grandfather's antiquated corrugated-iron-and-wood workshop in the backyard to observe the great lights, so reminiscent of the 20th Century Fox film-logo. From there it was like sitting in the mezzanine section of a large open-air theatre.

Christmas and New Year were celebrated for obvious reasons, while 'Guy ('Guido') Fawkes', an English tradition adopted by most South Africans of the time, was celebrated annually on 5 November, in memory of the 'guy' who tried to blow up the House of Lords in the Westminster Palace in Britain on 5 November 1605. During the festivities colourful firework-displays could be seen exploding over the city all through the evening until the early hours of the morning. These festivities have recently been dropped (and rightly so) with only remnants of our population still engaging in it these days; why anyone would have wanted to celebrate it in the first place boggles the mind ... I guess it was still a cultural remnant from the early Uitlander ('Foreigner') days of Johannesburg's hectic gold-rush era.

Joburg became part of WW2 when the South African government, as a dominion member under the able leadership of the prime-minister, General Jan Smuts and in sympathy with Great Britain, declared war on the axis powers of Germany, Italy and Japan not long after Hitler's invasion of Poland in 1939. General Smuts, the only statesman in history who was signatory to the *Treaty of Vereeniging* in 1902, the *Versailles Treaty* in 1919 and the *United Nations Charter* in 1946 after WW2, was co-opted by Sir Winston Churchill into his war-cabinet alongside other senior members of note, while Adolf Hitler and his ally, Mussolini, were briskly on the march to conquer the world. It would only be a matter of time before such world-changing events (and in some cases, tragedies) as Tobruk, El Alamein, Pearl Harbour, Hiroshima & Nagasaki, D-Day and notorious places like the Warsaw ghetto, Auschwitz and Treblinka etc. would forever change the political landscape of the world.

As horrific as the atom bombs on Japanese cities were, historians tell us that the devastation inflicted on German cities like Dresden, Hamburg and Cologne and other targets in the Ruhr etc. (by thousands of tons of incendiary devices and other ordinary explosives) together far

exceeded the devastation meted out to those Japanese cities; was it General Patton who had said: *"War is hell!"* (?).

At home, my grandfather, GullusG., had also by now received his marching orders and was instructed to report at the 'Zwartkop Air Force Base' in Pretoria in preparation, probably 3 months basic training, for his trip to North Africa. Before leaving for war, he had instructed his family to hang thicker curtains in front of the windows (as air-raid precautions) and to buy smaller briquettes of coal for the stove easier for his sons to gather and carry into the house etc. Chores were allocated commensurate with the age and capabilities of each child, and then my grandfather left for his appointment in the North African desert with Field Marshall Erwin Rommel, the 'Desert Fox'.

One negative upshot at home from the war was that street gangs were rife and had been proliferating with regular impunity because of the strong emphasis on the war and the many able-bodied men who were absent far away in the North African desert. After dark, small children huddled in kitchens at home, while wartime parties and celebrations still braved the elements outside in clubs and at theatres. Fortunately, the main theatre-of-war was far removed from South Africa, and the only serious threats were the German U-boats menacing the coastline of Africa and the many casualties on the front with soldiers missing-in-action.

After Hitler's demise on 30 April 1945 and the capitulation of Germany to the Allies (which included Russia), the soldiers were free to come home, and they were welcomed by their loved ones at Wembley Stadium in Johannesburg with great fanfare and joy. Life could finally return to normal again ... but only for some, not for all. My mother's uncle who earlier had been declared 'missing in action at Tobruk', arrived later at home one day to find his wife married to another man ... another strange casualty of the war. Now and then he would arrive at my grandparents' home in Cottesloe in 1961 with a worn knapsack and where I sometimes have had to type letters of correspondence on his behalf on JeanetteG.'s little Olivetti typewriter. His claim to fame among our family circles was that during the war he had fought alongside the business tycoon and millionaire, Harry Oppenheimer, in the same regiment.

While relaxing at home one day, my grandfather handed some cash (in those days the British pound, shilling and penny were still used) to my mother's little kid brother, CorrieG., with the instruction to go and buy cigarettes at Marais' Café on the corner, not far from their home in Braamfontein. Those days were long before the days of age-restrictions on cigarette-sales to minors. It also was the days of the 'Big Band' bandleader, Glenn Miller, whose plane in which he was travelling as a guest, later was shot down by the Germans during WW2.

Be that as it may, my grandfather, GullusG., and his brother AwieG., were still relaxing in the lounge when little CorrieG. came running back into the house, the little boy in tears.

"They have taken our money!" he sobbed.

"What? Who's 'they'?" my grandfather wanted to know.

"The men at the shop ... I think it's the AJ-gang!" little CorrieG. exclaimed.

"Where are they now?" my grandfather asked.

"They are probably still playing the slot-machines with our money!"

Now, there was one thing that the gang-members had probably clearly overlooked ... they had never seen war in the Northern desert, an error that in the end would prove to be their ultimate undoing. My grandfather and his brother, both war-veterans fresh from the war, and, with his

brother AwieG. a former missing-in-action survivor of the *Battle of Tobruk*, walked into the little café like two fire-breathing dragons, asking little CorrieG.:

"Which one took your money?"

"Those four guys!" as he pointed to where four members of the notorious AJ-gang were gleefully engaged in playing the raucous slot-machines of the time ... with my grandfather's cigarette-money.

"Who took my cigarette-money from this little boy?" my grandfather asked.

"I did ... and what's more, I am not giving it back!" the leader of the gang, AJ, replied, while standing up to my grandfather with the insolent, defiant attitude of a typical Chicago gangster. My grandfather, then in his late thirties, grabbed AJ, the leader, by the scruff of the neck and the seat of the pants, turned him upside down, and with him dangling head down and feet up in the air, started shaking all the coins out of his pockets as fast as little CorrieG. could pick it up. The other gang-members stood menacingly closer with one even brandishing a knife, but my father's brother, AwieG., stopped them dead in their tracks:

"Don't provoke us, gentlemen!" he told them. *"We are war-veterans and we've just arrived from North Africa where we've given the Jerries the hiding of their life. Don't try something you will only later come to regret!"*

Upon this threat from the wily infantryman and his equally crafty military-policeman brother, the gang retreated to the safety of the streets and disappeared into the huge metropolis without another word. A few years later the wife of AJ, the insolent gang-leader, reportedly paid an assassin to kill the gang-leader to get rid of her own degenerate excuse of a husband once and for all. This story was told to us by my mother, a teenager at the time.

References

1. Britannica.com. *Alfred Milner, Viscount Milner.* Online 2022.
2. Britannica.com. *World War 2.* Online 2022.
3. Kraus, René (1944) *Old Master: The Life of Jan Christian Smuts.* E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc. New York.
4. SouthAfrica.net. *The History of Joburg, City of Gold (ZA).* Online 2022.
5. Stassen, Sannie. *The Memoirs of Sannie Stassen.*
6. The Heritage Portal. *Milner Park, Johannesburg.* Online 2022.
7. Treaties.UN.org. *Charter of the United Nations.* Online 2022.
8. Wikipedia, *Benny Goodman.* Online 2022.
9. Wikipedia. *Airforce Base Swartkop.* Online 2022.
10. Wikipedia. *Brixton, Johannesburg.* Online 2022.
11. Wikipedia. *Cologne.* Online 2022.
12. Wikipedia. *Cottesloe, Johannesburg.* Online 2022.
13. Wikipedia. *Dresden.* Online 2022.
14. Wikipedia. *Erwin Rommel.* Online 2022.
15. Wikipedia. *First Battle of El Alamein.* Online 2022.
16. Wikipedia. *General S. Patton.* Online 2022.
17. Wikipedia. *Glenn Miller.* Online 2022.
18. Wikipedia. *Guy Fawkes.* Online 2022.
19. Wikipedia. *Hamburg.* Online 2022.
20. Wikipedia. *Jan Smuts.* Online 2022.
21. Wikipedia. Johannesburg, California. Online. 2022.
22. Wikipedia. Johannesburg. Online 2022.
23. Wikipedia. *Pretoria.* Online 2022.

24. Wikipedia. *Ruhr.* Online 2022.
25. Wikipedia. *Second Battle of El Alamein.* Online 2022.
26. Wikipedia. *Siege of Tobruk.* Online 2022.
27. Wikipedia. *Treaty of Vereeniging.* Online 2022.
28. Wikipedia. *Treaty of Versailles.* Online 2022.
29. Wikipedia. *Westminster Palace.* Online 2022.

3

Easy Credit

A person who can't pay gets another person who can't pay to guarantee that he can pay.
[Charles Dickens, 1812-1870].

South Africans love to buy on credit, and not only does it appear to be a pathological obsession with them, but probably also an incurable national disease. This tradition, nay culture, has been handed down for centuries from generation to generation, and if all loans and hire-purchases were to be recalled on one single day, the country would probably completely collapse. I have alluded to it before, and I allude to it again: This is just about the one and only country in the world that I know with a big hole in it ... remember Kimberley?

During the 1950s, in Randgate, there were several interesting shops where people shopped, mostly Jewish and Indian. Jews have, in South Africa, over the decades found the country a haven to do business in, and many of the children and grandchildren of the old Jewish hawkers and wayside shopkeepers of the bygone era of South Africa's colonial past are the millionaires and tycoons of Johannesburg today.

The cultural inhospitality meted out to Jews in other countries during centuries of injustice were now being meted out, albeit less brutally, to the foreigners, the Indians, a thriving and industrious business-community who originally were imported from India to work on the sugar-plantations of the Natal coast. Even today, Durban, named after Sir Benjamin D'Urban, is still referred to, satirically, as an extension of 'Urban India'. Bikers refer to Durban as 'Durbs' (to rhyme with 'turps') due to the resort's notoriously corrosive effect of its humid climate on their glossy stallions.

The first car that came to Randgate was in 1901 and belonged to a certain Mr. Mackay. For years the 'Mackay's Garage' operated its lucrative business in Randfontein, even during my schoolboy years there. During the 1950s, motorists entering Randfontein from the Johannesburg-Krugersdorp side could read such amusing road-safety billboard-messages as, *'Bright Drivers Dim; Dim Drivers Don't!'* and '*Jaag om 'n draai en jou lewe sal waai!'* (Afrikaans: *'Race Around the Bend and Your Life Will End'!)*).

My parents used to migrate intermittently within the Randgate precinct, as some neglected children perhaps would complain, *"Our parents moved a lot, but we found them every time!"* Houses in Randgate date from 1869 ('Jonker Huis') through the time of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) up till the modern 'bungaloes' of today. My mother had, as alluded to before, an account at Simon's General Dealer where she could buy groceries and other odds and ends on 'credit'. Our house was in a short walking-distance from this shop. This, however, was long before the old man and his wife had been murdered in their annexe to the shop by burglars (or burgled and killed by murderers).

This was the self-same house where my father had tried his hand at chicken-farming once, until it had grown so big prompting a fuming town clerk to enforce immediate closure. The place was beginning to resemble a little agricultural smallholding, and I must admit that it was quite fun to run around catching wayward chickens with our hands ... for a six-year-old like me there was something unmistakably disgusting but equally fascinating about the smell of a wet chicken in the rain. This incident, a source of some modest shame and embarrassment, had haunted me for years, until I read one day that the same thing had happened to the famous actor and wannabe chicken-farmer, Glenn Ford, my father's favourite cowboy, in Beverly Hills once. Maybe my father was just emulating his hero.

HansS., my brother who had earlier gone to buy the matches on credit for me, only about four years younger than I, was an interesting but sometimes quite exasperating little fellow. One afternoon he disappeared completely from planet earth, and we must have been searching for him for some time (those were before the days of so-called 'alien abductions') before we discovered him in one of those deep service-pits in our garage from which mechanics worked on cars from below without having to jack up the car. He had fallen into the pit after he had tried to drag a rope with a bulky knot in it into the garage underneath the worn wooden garage-door instead of properly opening the door first.

He apparently had heaved and pulled until the knot eventually went through, dumping him into the pit due to the momentum. On other occasions I used to come home from school to find that my mother had bought each of us a little plastic toy (car) of which the boot (of the luggage-compartment) as well as the bonnet (of the engine compartment) hinged prettily open, only to discover that his had already been completely demolished and mine, which my mother had in the meantime 'loaned' to him to play in the interim with, was already damaged beyond all hope of repair.

Anyway, have I mentioned earlier how easy it was to get 'credit' in South Africa, especially in those days? In retrospect, I find it almost inconceivable today that, when my brother emerged from Simon's General Dealer with that lethal box of matches bought on my mother's account, he was barely 4 years old.

References

1. Britannica.com. *Sir Benjamin D 'Urban*. Online 2022.
2. SAHistory.org. *Second Anglo-Boer War.* Online 2022.
3. SAHistory.org. *First Anglo-Boer War.* Online 2022.
4. Wikipedia. *Beverly Hills, California*. Online 2022.
5. Wikipedia. *Big Hole (Kimberley).* Online 2022.
6. Wikipedia. *Durban.* Online 2022.
7. Wikipedia. *Krugersdorp.* Online 2022.
8. Wikipedia. *South Africa.* Online 2022.

4

In My Father's Shoes

Ambition often puts men upon doing the meanest offices;
so climbing is performed in the same posture as creeping.
[Jonathan Swift, 1667-1745].

When I was young, I always used to complain to my mother (and others too) that we were living in a plain, nondescript little village. How was I to know and appreciate at the age of five, seven and nine that I was born on one of the most prodigiously rich gold-reefs in the world? For those who do not know, Randgate is a little mining-village suburb of Randfontein, and is described as follows:

"Randfontein's existence dates to the 1550s when the AmaNdebele lived as one nation at Emhlangeni (today's Randfontein area) under King Mhlanga approximately between 1550-1580. The name of Emhlangeni is translated today into the Sesotho language as Mohlakeng, which is one of the southeastern suburbs of the town. Randfontein was established formally in 1890 and proclaimed a municipality in 1929. Some important dates in Randfontein's history:

- 1857: Bootha and Jonker families arrive in the area. (They owned the farm Groot Elandsvlei where the suburbs of Randgate, Loumarina, and Wilbotsdal are today).

- 1874: Gold discovered in Blaauwbank stream near Magaliesburg by Henry Lewis an Australian prospector.

- 1886: Discovery of gold on the Rand by Harrison and Walker; start of the Reef gold rush.

- 1886: JB Robinson arrives on the Reef; starts prospecting in the Randfontein area.

- 1889: Randfontein Estates Gold Mining Company (REGM) registered.

- 1890: JB Robinson buys properties and farms in the Randfontein district.

- 1894: The first shop, Fedlers, opens.

- 1901: The first car, owned by Hector Mackay, arrives in town.

- 1904: Chinese miners arrive in Randfontein.

- 1929: Randfontein Municipality established; independent from Krugersdorp which managed the town from 1903.

- 1979: Randfontein celebrates 50 years as an independent municipality."

[Wikipedia].

My father used to work, among others, at the 'Randfontein Estates Gold Mining Company' mine, at the time reputed to sport the largest stamp-mill (600 stamps), with which to crush the gold-bearing ore, in the world. Stamp-mills crush material by pounding instead of grinding.

Diagonally opposite where 'Harry's Roadhouse' is situated today, at the entrance to Randfontein from the Johannesburg side and next to the railway line, the graves of five Britons, who perished during Dr. Leander-Starr Jameson's infamous 'Jameson Raid' of 29 December 1895 to 2 January 1896, can, reportedly, still be found. The names of the five are W.C. Beatty-Powell, J.B. Bletsoe, Harry David, John Foster and C.E. Henney. Dr. Leander-Starr Jameson later became the object of Rudyard Kipling's famous poem 'If', probably inspired by the dear (but sometimes misguided) doctor's successful raids earlier on the recalcitrant Matabele-tribe in Rhodesia.

Instead of having him charged and prosecuted in South Africa after the abortive raid, the red herring of Dr. Jameson, however, was dispatched to Queen Victoria in England by Paul Kruger, president of the 'Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek' (Z.A.R.), for her (and her government) to deal with. The words to Rudyard Kipling's poem 'If' (by courtesy of Wikipedia) are as follows:

IF

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:
If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:
If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: —Hold on!
If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And — which is more — you'll be a Man, my son!

[Rudyard Kipling, 1865 -1936]

I remember Randgate as blistering hot in summer (up to 37°C maximum) and bitterly cold on winter mornings (down to - 8°C in winter). Our primary school was not far from our home, and we used to be served fried fish in winter and fruit and/or milk in summer. Malnutrition apparently was rife on the Rand at the time as a result from the massive earlier 'poor-white Afrikaner' problem caused by the mass-immigration of rural folk (as well as others in the search of jobs) to the Rand from farms and rural towns all over South Africa. Interestingly, Randfontein was recently, at the time of writing, announced the town in South Africa with the fastest broadband download speed (10 Mbit/s) in South Africa.

In South Africa in those days young boys were encouraged to join the Afrikaner cultural movement the 'Voortrekkers' ('Pioneers' sporting scouting aims not unlike Lord Baden-Powell's iconic 'Boy Scouts' movement).

Whereas the Boy Scouts used to wear brown, in those days the Voortrekkers predominantly wore bottle-green, with black shorts and an orange neck-scarf. My brother HansS. and I joined the Voortrekkers for some time, and we used to look pretty dashing in our outfits. In Randgate, our headquarters was at a little ancient pioneer's house, the 'Jonker House' (named after one of the first inhabitants of Randgate), a rock-and-mortar house as rock-solid as Gibraltar, built in 1859. On the other hand, in Carletonville, a mining town to which we were to translocate to later, the Boy Scouts had this charming little 'log cabin' down at the edge of the town for its headquarters.

Randgate had a thriving little main street lined with shops of all kinds, but for striped pyjama-cloth we had to drive out to Randfontein where it used to sell at 1^{s}11^{d} ('One-and-Eleven') per yard. My mother then used this material to make us new (striped) pyjamas, from my father down to me and my two kid brothers, HansS. and CorrieS. Bear in mind that, in those days in South Africa, bicycles were still registered as *bona fide* 'roadworthy vehicles' and had to be fitted with numberplates. I stand to be corrected but a typical number for a numberplate on a bicycle consisted of a number with perhaps only one or two digits.

On weekend visits to my grandparents in Auckland Park, Johannesburg, our boys were smartly dressed in immaculately little white 'bosbaadjies' (pronounced 'boss-by-kees'), precursors to the much maligned 'safari suits' to follow much later. Men still wore hats in public in those days, and one can still observe the fashion in the old monochrome (black & white, 1940s-1950s 'noir') movies, especially crime & detective stories. My father smoked 'Boxer Tobacco' in his pipe, or, alternatively, 'Springbok Tobacco'. The little Springbok Tobacco bag, a type of cotton container unlike the paper-container of Boxer Tobacco, made a sturdy little makeshift rugby ball for impromptu rugby-games with us kids on the lawn at home.

Drive with me to the 'Sterkfontein Caves' and 'Wonderfontein Caves' just beyond Krugersdorp, the oldest town in the old Transvaal and our near neighbour *en route* to Johannesburg, City of Gold. It's about a 30 minutes' drive in a late 1000cc 1940s Morris Minor. Here the visitor can descend into caves that reportedly can, theoretically, accommodate a fourteen-story building with ease.

My first visit to these caves was as a 7-year-old child in 1954, and we used to be issued with primitive little paraffin (kerosene) lamps for the tour of the caves. Later tourists were issued hardhats fitted with battery-powered headlamps. Today the place is lit up like an ancient gothic cathedral. The ambience is magnificent and the silence so thick it is almost audible.

A few paces into the caves, always led by an experienced guide, one will (among others) come across a massive stalagmite in the shape of a huge pulpit and it stands there as foreboding today as it had stood when, I surmise, Sir Rider Haggard, the great storyteller, had come across it for the first time on his trips to South Africa. Rider Haggard's Allan Quartermain adventures were inspired by his trips to Africa, and stories like *King Solomon's Mines, She* and others were later filmed more than once. In the biography, *Rider Haggard: The Great Storyteller*, D.S. Higgins refers to Haggard's description of this rock called the 'pulpit':

"We had each provided ourselves with a packet of candles, and by the light of these the moist and glistening stalactite formations an unusual and pretty sight. The dripping water from above, charged with lime, had formed numerous pillars of varying thickness, In the centre, about eight feet from the floor, there was an opening in a very thick pillar resembling a pulpit."
[Higgins: 31].

Apparently, people used to love Haggard's 'Allan Quartermain' adventures from Africa, and his stories were later filmed with great success featuring such internationally renowned actors as Stewart Granger, Deborah Kerr and Harrison Ford. Few people, however, realise the terrible price exacted by fate for the privilege of having been able to publish those stories. Haggard recollects in his travel-diary:

"It seemed queer, riding along in the heat over those desolate African plains, gun in hand, to think of the people at home, and the holly-decked rooms, the warm fire and the church-bells. We never realize what it means until we become wanderers on the face of the earth – the old home, the old faces, and the Christmas Days of our childhood."
[Higgins: 24].

In those days most boys of my age (when I was about 4) were inclined to adulate their fathers, and while my father (at the time in 1951-55) was only a lowly mineworker (shaft-carpenter) at the Randfontein Estates mine, I was no exception to the rule. It was in this period that we also went to see the 1939-film, *The Wizard of Oz*, at the Gaiety Theatre in Johannesburg, one of the first films in 'Technicolor' and probably my first.

My father was, as mentioned earlier, an avid reader of westerns, e.g., Zane Grey and Louis L'Amour etc. and theatregoer, and I fondly remember the days of Glenn Ford as the *The Sheepman*, Richard Egan as *West Tancred* and (much later) Alan Ladd as *Shane.* My father and I also later went to see *Judgment at Nuremberg* and *The Bridge on the River Kwai* during the early sixties when I was 12, and other popular films that showed at the Royalty and Plaza theatres in those days in Randfontein were *Fire Down Below*, *The Enemy Below* and Lex Barker's *Tarzan*.

How ecstatic we had been when he came home one evening with that little green Morris Minor 1000, our first proper car; but more interestingly was the pair of shoes with which my father came home one day. They were brown lace-up shoes with thick rubber-soles that went *swish-swish* every time he walked across the wooden plank-floors of our modest house in Langerman Street.

In fact, that magical 'swish-swish' enthralled me so such that I began to explore ways in which to emulate my father with my ordinary pair of rubber-soled school-shoes, reserved for going-out only. I, however, took this adulation a bit too far one day. In the front of our yard was a little circle-shaped fishpond about three feet (± 1 m) in diameter. I soon discovered that, if I submerged my little shoes about sole-deep into its murky waters, they would also go *swish-swish* for a while, exactly like my father's; but I hit the jackpot soon afterwards when I discovered (and bear in mind that it was my father who originally had started it all, not I) that, by standing knee-deep in the fishpond with my shoes for about ten minutes, I could go much farther with my *swish-swish* shoes than I had ever done before, and I'd rather be sopping wet than out of fashion.

References

1. Britannica.com. *Boy Scouts.* Online 2202.
2. Britannica.com. *Ndebele: South African People.* Online 2022.
3. Gauteng.net. *Blaauwbank Historic Gold Mine.* Online 2022.

4. Johannesburg1912.com. *Theatres & Bioscopes in Early Johannesburg.* Online.2022.
5. Journals.co.za. *The Wonderfontein Caves.* Online 2022.
6. PoetryFoundation.org. *'IF' (Rudyard Kipling).* Online 2022.
7. SAHistory.org. *Matabele Wars 1836-1896.* Online 2022.
8. TheDiggings.com. *Randfontein Estates Gold Mine (South Africa).* Online 2022.
9. Wikipeda. *Queen Victoria.* Online 2022.
10. Wikipeda. *Transvaal (Province).* Online 2022.
11. Wikipedia. *Allan Quatermain.* Online 2022.
12. Wikipedia. *Auckland Park, Johannesburg.* Online 2022.
13. Wikipedia. *Carnegie Commission of Investigation on the Poor White Question in South Africa.* Online 2022.
14. Wikipedia. *George Harrison (Prospector).* Online 2022.
15. Wikipedia. *Great Trek.* Online 2022.
16. Wikipedia. *H. Rider Haggard.* Online 2022.
17. Wikipedia. *Jameson Raid.* Online 2022.
18. Wikipedia. *Judgment at Nuremberg.* Online 2022.
19. Wikipedia. *King Solomon's Mines.* Online 2022.
20. Wikipedia. *Leander Starr Jameson.* Online 2022.
21. Wikipedia. *Louis L'Amour.* Online 2022.
22. Wikipedia. *Magaliesburg.* Online 2022.
23. Wikipedia. *Mohlakeng.* Online 2022.
24. Wikipedia. *Morris Minor.* Online 2022.
25. Wikipedia. *Paul Kruger.* Online 2022.
26. Wikipedia. *Rhodesia.* Online 2022.
27. Wikipedia. *Robert Baden-Powell, 1st Baron Baden-Powell.* Online 2022.
28. Wikipedia. *Rudyard Kipling.* Online 2022.
29. Wikipedia. *Sir Joseph Robinson, 1st Baronet.* Online 2022.
30. Wikipedia. *South African Republic (ZAR).* Online 2022.
31. Wikipedia. *Sterkfontein Caves/Maropeng.* Online 2022.
32. Wikipedia. *Tarzan.* Online 2022.
33. Wikipedia. *Technicolor.* Online 2022.
34. Wikipedia. *The Bridge on the River Kwai.* Online 2022.
35. Wikipedia. *The Wizard of Oz (1939).* Online 2022.
36. Wikipedia. *Transvaal (Colony).* Online 2022.
37. Wikipedia. *Witwatersrand Gold Rush.* Online 2022.
38. Wikipedia. *Zane Grey.* Online 2022.

5

The Blue Harley-Davidson

Reminiscence makes one feel so deliciously aged and sad.
[George Bernard Shaw, 1856-1950].

During World War 2, from about 1943 to 1945, my maternal grandfather was stationed in North Africa fighting General Erwin Rommel, the 'Desert Fox', on the side of the Allies. He was assigned to a military police regiment, and eventually, at the end of the war, returned home to South Africa where a highly emotional reunion with his family had been arranged for him at the Wembley Stadium in Johannesburg (as the case was with other soldiers too) by the military authorities.

One of the 'perks' of his military service in the war was the gift of a motorcycle from the army (whether as a gift or on auction and at a reduced price I do not know), complete with 'side-car', i.e., the single-seater passenger-compartment. It was a blue 740 cc. Harley-Davidson, champion of the era and one of only two motorcycles (the other one being the 'Indian') that apparently had survived the Great Depression in the USA. I still cherish a photograph of myself sitting on that motorcycle as a toddler in about 1948:

> *"One of only two American cycle manufacturers to survive the Great Depression, Harley-Davidson again produced large numbers of motorcycles for the US Army in World War II and resumed civilian production afterwards, producing a range of large V-twin motorcycles that were successful both on racetracks and for private buyers. Harley-Davidson, on the eve of World War II, was already supplying the Army with a military-specific version of its 45 cubic inches (740 cc) WL line, called the WLA. The A in this case stood for "Army". Upon the outbreak of war, the company, along with most other manufacturing enterprises, shifted to war work. More than 90,000 military motorcycles, mostly WLA's and WLG's (the Canadian version) were produced, many to be provided to Allies. Harley-Davidson received two Army-Navy 'E' Awards, one in 1943 and the other in 1945, which were awarded for Excellence in Production."*
>
> [Wikipedia].

I still cherish fond memories of that Harley-Davidson. My grandfather, as well as his two older sons, CorrieG. and GullusG., used to ride it often, either to work or to go shopping with. It also was a favourite mode of leisure-transport for younger people, especially to impress the ladies with on weekends at the Zoo Lake, Emmarentia Dam or Florida Lake in post-war courtships.

People still acquainted with wartime Harleys will remember that the Harley-Davidson, in this case probably the 'Canadian' version, emitted a terrifying sound; taking off sounded more like a 1940s *Avro Lancaster* bomber on its way to the Rühr for the strategic bombing of German industries, and that Harley approaching our home sounded much like a sputtering *Messerschmitt AG* on fire coming in to crash. To little children a Harley-Davidson on a roll was as terrifying as it was fascinating.

As a young bachelor in 1955, my uncle GullusG. lived with us at Lazar Avenue in Randgate from where he used to commute to his work at the Randfontein Estates mine's production-works section about 5 kilometres (about 3 miles) away. This was the same goldmine whose melancholy ship's foghorn (announcing its morning-shift) used to wake us up at 6am every morning for school, so reminiscent of the coal mine in the film *How Green Was My Valley*.

That little cottage, a relic from Anglo-Boer War times and the venue where my sister, CorneliaS., was born, has long since been demolished. It was also in that little cottage, a mortar, wood and corrugated-tin effort, where our family ragdoll, Popeye, was one day officially laid to rest with full military honours after a formal funeral procession comprising myself, my brother Hans., my cousin JimmyS. and Jimmy's sister, MaudS. I was about seven at the time ... it was the end of an era.

My uncle GullusG. was a tall, sinewy guy who looked like a cross between Michael Rennie and Gary Cooper, dashingly handsome and a kind person who loved children with whom he was very popular. In fact, on my 7th birthday that year (1955) he gave me the marvellous birthday-gift of 5 shillings, a small fortune for a boy my age. My total birthday-takings at the end of the day eventually accrued to the magnificent sum of 15 shillings, for my paternal grandmother was also visiting that week.

My father nevertheless duly confiscated all my money after he had bought me my choice-of-toy at the Indian shop, the 'Wheatlands Trading Store', up the road for 3 shillings and 6 pence (3s. 6d.). Apparently, my parents had been having a hard time financially and the birthday-money must have come as a Godsend for the benefit of the entire family.

My uncle GullusG., however, had a nasty brush with the kerb (pavement/sidewalk) on his Harley-Davidson one afternoon on the way home from work. He was living with us at the time in Langerman Street in Randgate and, as soon as he had turned the corner where Simon's General Dealer was situated, the Harley's side-car unexpectedly came loose and, while my uncle turned left in the general direction of our home, the side-car simply proceeded with its trajectory in a straight line toward the fence on the empty lot adjacent to our house. It took the adults some time to reassemble the headstrong side-car and motorcycle again. In retrospect ... what if somebody (a passenger) had been in it at the time?

My uncle GullusG. had one serious weakness however, and that was that when he was inebriated, he had the habit of becoming short-tempered and argumentative (usually they all do). He also was an experienced brawler of many a brush with drunks in the pub. One day, while returning home from work and as soon he had arrived at the spot where he had to turn toward the right up into our driveway, a quite sincere but momentarily inconsiderate cyclist nonchalantly ignored my uncle's vehicle and rode right into my uncle's path obstructing his way. Now whether the cyclist technically had had the right of way I am not sure (I suspect he probably had) but the unwritten rule in those days was that cyclists had to always yield to 'serious' (superior) vehicles, especially when such a vehicle was a heavy-duty truck or a Harley with a side-car.

I suspect it was not necessarily the act itself that had sparked my uncle's ire, but the impertinent way it was (allegedly) committed, and, with the cyclist merrily speeding ahead down the road, my uncle swerved around and started giving chase to the cyclist in his blue Harley-Davidson. From what I understood from my mother he must have passed the cyclist on his left (an illegal and unsafe manoeuvre), then grabbed the cyclist behind the collar and pulled him right from his bicycle across the seat where he was sitting on the Harley and dumped him into the side-car on his left. He then stopped at the kerb and proceeded to punch the living daylights out of the dazed cyclist.

One Friday-afternoon my uncle asked whether I would be interested in joining him on a trip to my grandparents' house in Johannesburg (Cottesloe) on a visit for the weekend. As my parents were also anyway envisaging a visit to my grandparents on the same weekend, I immediately concurred and proceeded to pack my little overnight bag, as usual with my mother's help, of course. The exciting prospect of driving to Johannesburg, about an hour's drive, as a passenger in the blue Harley-Davidson had rendered my decision a no-brainer.

Years later, after I had left school, the closest I could come to emulating my uncle in his blue Harley-Davidson was to buy a funky little blue 50 cc. Vespa scooter for myself; after all, singer Cliff Richard had also then only recently bought one. That scooter I drove for some time along

the 5 kilometres (about 3 miles) en route to where I worked as a young 'learner-tracer' at the 'West Driefontein Gold Mining Co. Ltd.' in Carletonville in 1967, and only sold it after a farmhand on a ramshackle old tractor one day overtook me on the road to Westonaria, a neighbouring mining town where my uncle CorrieG. and his family lived. That insult was more than what flesh and blood could bear. I sold the scooter to my brother HansS. the next day.

Nevertheless, we departed from our house in Randgate in the Harley on Friday-afternoon and followed the route along Randfontein's iconic Main Reef Road past Krugersdorp, all the way through Newlands etc. (still on Main Reef Road) until we had finally reached Cottesloe. It was an exhilarating ride, my first time in the side-car of a Harley-Davidson. What I could not understand, though, was why, every time a traffic-cop (a 'speed-cop' in South Africa) along the way came into sight, my uncle would tell me to duck below to the 'lower deck' of the sidecar i.e., away and out of sight of the traffic-cop.

References

1. Britannica.com. *Great Depression.* Online 2022.
2. RoodepoortRecord.co.za. *The Rich History of Roodepoort.* Online 2022.
3. Silveragecoins.com. *1960 Elizabeth II English Shilling.* Online 2022.
4. Wikipedia. *Army-Navy 'E' Award.* Online 2022.
5. Wikipedia. *Avro Lancaster.* Online 2022.
6. Wikipedia. *Harley-Davidson.* Online 2022.
7. Wikipedia. *How Green Was My Valley (Film).* Online 2022.
8. Wikipedia. *Messerschmitt AG.* Online 2022.
9. Wikipedia. *Newlands.* Johannesburg. 2022.
10. Wikipedia. *Popeye.* Online 2022.
11. Wikipedia. *West Driefontein.* Online 2022.

6

How Not to Buy a Car

Do other men, for they would do you. That's the true business precept.
[Jonas Chuzzlewit in Charles Dickens, 1812-1870].

I was the eldest child in our family and the first car my father ever brought home, as far as I can remember, was a little black 1940s Ford Prefect and not as pretty as the Morris Minor mentioned earlier. It was in 1950 if I am not mistaken, and we were living in Randgate in a house in Langerman Street, not far from the primary school I was destined one day in 1953 for the first time to attend.

My parents must have rented the house because I never really experienced the place as 'home'. My mother had dubbed it *"die vuil huis"* ("the dirty house") because it had stood in such a dire need of a paint and a general make-over, i.e., the desperate real estate agent's typical (nightmarish) and doubtful 'TLC' proposition.

They were two struggling young marrieds, with my father working somewhere on one of the numerous mines of the gold-rich main reef of the Witwatersrand. So prodigious was the gold discovered in that vicinity in 1886 that the long winding road leading from Johannesburg through suburbs like Newlands, Industria, Maraisburg. Witpoortjie and the independent towns of Krugersdorp and Randfontein (all, for all practical intents and purposes, 'suburbs' of the greater, sprawling metropolis of Johannesburg) were named after the very main reef it geographically epitomised, i.e., 'Main Reef Road'.

It was also in that house where I had had the privilege of attending my first ever wedding at Muldersdrift, a little farming community not far from there, about half-an-hour's drive in the Ford. All I can remember of the wedding was that the groom, PietT., had large cauliflower ears and that the bride, Babie, was decked in powder blue.

At that time my parents had also had the habit of attending the movies quite regularly ... they were devout movie-goers, as just about everyone was who had grown up in Johannesburg between the great wars. My father, a prolific reader of Louis L 'Amour books, had a favourite genre in cinema, i.e., the 'Western', or 'Cowboy' movie, with one of his favourites, the inimitable Glenn Ford (the actor from *The Sheepman* fame). As mentioned before, his fondness for books by L' Amour and Zane Grey and movies founded on such books were fast beginning to rub off also on me.

My father had taken me, on this day of the wedding and back at the wedding-reception at the large farmhouse in Muldersdrift, for a walk around what had appeared to be a large rectangular dam with windmill constructed as a watering hole for the farm animals on the premises, undoubtedly a type of 'smallholdings' (called a 'plot') or something. Bear in mind that I was only 3 years old at the time, and my father about 27.

"So, where do cowboys come from?" I inquired, with my hands in my father's hand while walking around the farm-dam.

"From America." my father replied.

"America? Where's America?" I asked.

"Far away!" my father replied.

"Can we go there to see cowboys?" I asked.

"No, we can't. You see, most cowboys live far away across the sea!"

"What is the sea?"

"It's like a huge dam full of water!"

"Like this dam ... do cowboys live on the other side of this dam?"

"No, they live very far away across a much bigger dam called the sea ... we can't go there."

And so, on it went. My father was a miner at the time, but apparently eventually had branched out into *shaft-carpentry*, the 'trade' in which he continued to specialize in during his ten- or fifteen-years' tenure on the mines before he ventured into retail.

Now, miners are very fond of buying new or different cars, and I can remember that, in those early days, we had also driven a green 1941 Ford De Luxe, at least two 1000 cc. Morris Minors, of which one was a jazzy convertible, a Morris Oxford (all from the 1940s or 50s) and a large old Buick that veered dangerously to and fro on the road, probably because of worn shock absorbers.

There used to be, as mentioned before, a standing joke among miners, which I only learnt of much later in life, that they knew when a new car was due, was when the (cigarette) ashtrays in the house were all full. That was their cue, for in those days, miners lived predominantly for the present, and must have had a very poor intellectual grasp of the philosophical prudence of Plato's 'delayed gratification' principle in favour of greater rewards later.

So, there we were, driving the little 'baby' Ford Prefect all over our humdrum little village of Randgate like Vanderbilts in a Rolls Royce down 5th Avenue, New York on their way to the annual Easter Parade celebrations. The critical difference of, instead of getting out of the Rolls to buy a new Easter-bonnet, my mother probably would have gotten out of the Ford Prefect to buy a few yards of striped flannel-material at 1s 11d ('One-and-Eleven') per yard instead to make us all new pyjamas for winter (Remember *'The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas'?).*

For my 4th birthday (1951) they made the most welcome exception of buying me my first little bicycle, sidewheels and all. Those were still the days of pounds (£), shillings (s) and pence (d). *Twelve pence* made one *shilling*; and *twenty shillings* made one *pound*. *Five shillings* made a *crown* and *2 shillings & 6 pence: half-a-crown*. *Three pennies* made a *tickey* and *six pennies* a *sixpence* (obviously).

My father was a very industrious person who, by the sunset of his life, had spent 72 years either as an economically active employee and shaft-carpenter on the mines, or as an entrepreneur in the retail sector. At one time he held three different jobs simultaneously, i.e., as a travelling salesman for an Indian tycoon (selling clothes in neighbouring mining towns), as an insurance salesman (for a well-known South African insurance company) and as a used car salesman at the Voortrekker Garage (a used car dealer *cum* service station) in Randgate during the 1950s.

Although we, from time to time, surely must have from time to time suffered to some degree from the 'absentee father syndrome', I must admit that I have never, in the 65 years that I had known him, seen my father, a stocky, short-tempered individual, drunk or under the influence of liquor, or even cussing or physically abusing our mother.

Of the many other cars he has had the privilege of driving, I can still fondly remember such posh items (the garage's 'floor models' on loan) as the Anglia, DKW, Isabella Borgward, the Lloyd; later he bought a Ford Holden, a Ford Taunus, a few Volkswagen Beetles, a few Thames micro-busses, a Toyota microbus etc. He even had a big green Ford truck once, at the time when he secured the sawmill-contract to provide firewood for some client. What a superb scent, the

aroma of giant eucalyptus tree being sawed, sliced down and chopped up for firewood. He was, by the way, not deforesting, which I would today not have agreed with, or destroying natural woods; he was just harvesting trees in a bona fide plantation, probably owned by mine bosses, specifically established for the purpose.

Nevertheless, one day as we were driving to the Robinson Lake pleasure resort, not many miles from our home and more or less adjacent to the Robinson Hospital and the Robinson Golf Course, this little black, baby Ford Prefect broke down and stalled, leaving us stuck beside the road, as the story goes as told by my mother. My father got out of the car and started fiddling with the insides of the engine.

Having just said that it reminds me of the amusing anecdote about the time when Henry Ford had brought in a mechanical engineer to look at one of his cars that he simply could not get 'off the ground'. This engineer, a brilliant man with exceptional credentials, reportedly opened the bonnet of the car and started fiddling here and fiddling there. Finally, he asked for the engine to be turned, and presto, the car started. The engineer then presented Henry Ford with an invoice for what Henry Ford must have considered an outrageous amount.

"What ... so much just for fiddling?" Ford asked.

So, the engineer took the invoice and altered it to read:

"For fiddling" (ridiculously small $-amount).

"For knowing where to fiddle" ('outrageous' $-amount)!

Back to the breakdown of our Ford Prefect: Fortunately, another friendly motorist had in the meantime come along, i.e., an old man fitted out with some towing cables and stuff, and it was not long before they were able to take the turn into our driveway at our house in Randgate. The man removed the towing cable, and, while taking leave of us, asked my father:

"By the way, where did you buy this car?"

"From a friend, old so-and-so." my father replied.

"Well, take this advice from an old man today; never buy a car from a friend ... never!" said the old man as he drove off.

This story was a lesson apparently learnt the hard way. My parents then went into the house, probably brewed some coffee and then sat down at the kitchen table to discuss the problem of the malfunctioning vehicle. They looked at each other, then looked at the car where it was standing in the driveway, then looked at each other again. It was not the first time that they had had a quarrel with the obstinate little reprobate, and they were clearly getting sick and tired of it. So, that was it ... the car had to go.

Not long after my father then took his hat, the car's registration-papers, went out and sold the Ford Prefect ... to a friend.

References

1. Britannica.com. *Plato.* Online 2022.
2. CalgroM3.com. *Witpoortjie (Johannesburg).* Online 2022.
3. Geoview.info. *Industria (Johannesburg).* Online 2022.
4. Geoview.info. *Maraisburg (Johannesburg).* Online 2022.

5. IMDb. *The Sheepman (Film)*. Online 2022.
6. Mail & Guardian/article/2014-07-17/. *Robinson Lake/One Man's Home Is Another Man's Uranium Dump. Online 2022.*
7. Rolls-RoyceMotorcars.com. *Roll-Royce.* Online 2022.
8. Wikipedia. *1937 Ford Model C Ten.* Online 2022.
9. Wikipedia. *Coins of the South African Pound/Penny*. Online 2022.
10. Wikipedia. *Coins of the South African Pound/Tickey.* Online 2022.
11. Wikipedia. *Easter Bonnet.* Online 2022.
12. Wikipedia. *Easter Parade (Film).* Online 2022.
13. Wikipedia. *Fifth Avenue (New York City).* Online 2022.
14. Wikipedia. *Henry Ford.* Online 2022.
15. Wikipedia. *Muldersdrift.* Online 2022.
16. Wikipedia. *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas (Film).* Online 2022.
17. Wikipedia. *Vanderbilt Family*. Online 2022.
18. Wikipedia. *Witwatersrand.* Online 2022.

7

Breakfast in Rhodesia

Some people will never learn anything, for this reason,
because they understand everything too soon.
[Alexander Pope, 1688-1744].

In 1960, when I was 12 years old, my parents came to me with a proposition that simply was too good to refuse. My father and a friend, NaasS., were going to Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, to look at a modest little goldmine somewhere in the mountains of that picturesque country that was up for sale.

The goldmine belonged to a wealthy widow from Johannesburg, a Mrs.L., and she was searching for a suitable (prospective) buyer to take up residence at the mine and work it provisionally for a few months or so just to see if it still afterwards could be considered a feasible business proposition for such a prospective buyer to acquire. My father had heard of this proposition, and being an entrepreneur by nature, immediately shared the information with his friend NaasS. and persuaded him that it could be worthwhile to 'take an option' on the mine.

The idea was that the two families would travel to the site in Southern Rhodesia, where my father and his friend would get engaged with the mining operations on a provisional ('trying-out') basis while the women and children would take up residence in the large house traditionally reserved for the mine manager. If the purchase eventually went through and the sale was clinched, my friend, NaasS. Jr., uncle NaasS.'s son, and I were to remain in South Africa to first finish our schoolyear at the local high-school and then join the two families and other children in Southern Rhodesia later.

I say the proposition was 'too good to refuse' because of the promise of independence it potentially held for me as a kid. My friend was 15-years old, three years older than I was at the time, and I was to move in with him at their house not far from ours, about two minutes' walk. We were given a 'blank cheque' on two shops in our little village where our parents earlier had made proper arrangements for us to buy meat, groceries and other necessities on credit. Imagine a 12-year boy alone in a house for 3 months with the only 'parental oversight' that of a boy 15 years old (!) and with the parents on both sides out of the country.

Our parents would, upon their return, settle those accounts after their period of absence from South Africa had expired. I assume that they must have put down a guarantee of some kind in the form of a security-deposit at the affected shops.

It thus so happened that young NaasS. and I remained behind, while the two families travelled to Southern Rhodesia to take up residence at the mine. My father was very upbeat about the venture, and they really were raring to go; he was an experienced mineworker (not 'miner') and knew the production-processes of gold ore-beneficiation by heart. His friend, NaasS., was a career-entrepreneur and experienced self-made 'master-of-all-trades', i.e., a robust individual with the typical macho looks, demeanour and voice of a Sean Connery, a gentle man with a heart of gold.

When they arrived at the mine, the women went to settle down in the large house with the hungry and nagging kids while the two men started making plans for the first day's mining operations the next day. It was a small mine by today's standards but one out of which its first or previous owners must have made a real killing in its heyday.

The next afternoon, after the first day's exploration and efforts, my father and his friend emerged from the mine soaked in dust and grime and with a nugget about the size of his thumbnail which left them very disappointed. Although perseverance may, theoretically, have

proved profitable later, my mother was already growing very despondent, as she, a city-girl who had grown up in Johannesburg in suburbs like Ferndale, Craighall Park and Braamfontein, now suddenly has had to make do with the most primitive of amenities, far from the nearest little 'bundu shop'. The kids were also growing more and more restive, as there was nothing for them to do and nobody was ever allowed into the bush for fear of snakes and other wild animals.

One morning, long after the two men had already left for the mine, my mother woke up to the aroma of meat being barbequed over a fire. When she reached the backdoor, she noticed a large hare, stripped naked, stretched out over the coals ... it was being prepared as meal for a stranger that was subsequently discovered living in the lounge and reclining lazily with his hairy belly on a camp-stretcher; he had been contracted in by the two wannabe miners to come and assist them with the working of the mine.

This must have been the final straw, for from then it was all the way downhill for the so-called 'Rhodesia Mine Project'. My mother apparently made no secret of the fact that she disliked the new addition to the household intensely, while her friend, SophieS., my father's friend and colleague's wife, managed to exhibit a much more amiable attitude toward him 'for peace's sake'.

One morning, after my father had again reneged on his promise to take the women for grocery-shopping at the nearest little bundu-town, probably Zvishavane ('Shabani'), my mother and her friend, SophieS., decided to give the dilapidated old jalopy of a Buick a go after all and drive themselves to town ... by now my mother had had enough. When the hare-eating, hairy-bellied stranger (let's call him 'Bushy' for now), heard about the planned excursion to 'civilisation', he insisted on going along, as he himself had some urgent shopping to do.

My mother first refused, but her friend SophieS. insisted that he came along as *'protection for the women'.* So, they piled the kids into the old Buick and, with the menfolk buried away deep in the recesses of the pathetic little mine, SophieS., not an experienced driver, just took one aim in the general direction of town through the crack in the broken windscreen and brought her foot down on the accelerator. Bushy was sitting in the back with the kids, all of them holding on for dear life, while SophieS. steered the Buick down those precipitous heights and past steep ravines with the skill and finesse of an inebriated pilot trying to land a Tiger Moth in the Fish River Canyon. My mother later told us that it must have been the most harrowing trip of her life.

In town, the two women, with kids clinging to their skirts (in our case it would be HansS., CorrieS. CorneliaS. and ThysS., still a babe in arms) immediately set about buying the necessary rations for their miserly-stocked mountain abode at the mine, far out of town. My mother was also very irritated with the stranger, Bushy, and told him so in no uncertain terms. Her friend SophieS., however, a small, softspoken and more cordial type of a lady, displayed a more amiable demeanour, with the stranger who, facing her, then said:

"You I like ... I like you very much! But you (pointing to my mother) *... you I don't like you at all!"*

They shopped until they had procured most of the stuff they had come for, and was waiting for Bushy when he finally pitched and said (my paraphrasing):

"Don't go anywhere ... wait here. I first want to buy Sophie a special gift, because I like her very much. But you ... (again pointing to my mother) *... you won't get nothing ... I don't like you!"*

Then he vanished again. So, there they just stood on the concrete stoep of the decrepit little shop in Southern-Rhodesian town, waiting for Bushy and the special gift he had gone to find.

"What do you think he will buy?" SophieS. asked. *"I hope it's something nice!"*

"Look around you, Sophie," my mother replied, *"Do you see any jewellery shops, any gift shops? Now don't you put your hopes too high ... after all, what can he buy you in this godforsaken place?"*

"Well, let's wait and see!" SophieS. retorted. *"Maybe he's not so bad after all."*

A few minutes later Bushy appeared, smiling radiantly and brandishing the gift for SophieS. which he had so solemnly promised. Embarrassed, she dumped the parcel unceremoniously into her shopping bag without removing the clumsy gift-wrapping.

The next day, however, the entire party has had to start packing post-haste to return to South Africa; the feared 'Mau Mau' uprising that had already earlier caused much havoc in Kenya and that was still actively engaged in atrocities and attacks on colonials, including the senseless maiming of cattle etc. during 1952 to 1960, had now begun to spill over into Southern Rhodesia under revolutionaries like Robert Mugabe as well. News-footage of that 'Mau Mau' uprising later resulted in an alarming (film) documentary titled 'Africa Addio', which I later came to watch during the late 1960s as a teenager in Carletonville.

In Southern Rhodesia, where the mine was, the same flames of revolution were later (in 1963) to culminate in the emergence of ZANU-PF; in fact, rumours were afoot that members of that movement were already on the march, remnants of which were reported to have been seen en route to the mine ... it was time to get out.

The parties left in a haste, the following day, and with SophieS. still clutching the memorable gift from the hairy Bushy in her hands ... a box of 'corn flakes' cereal.

References

1. Britannica.com. *Kenya.* Online 2022.
2. Britannica.com. *Zimbabwe.* Online 2022.
3. InfoNamibia.com. *Fish River Canyon.* Online 2022.
4. SaHistory.org.za. *The Mau Mau Uprising.* Online 2022.
5. Wikipedia. *Africa Addio (Film).* Online 2022.
6. Wikipedia. *Braamfotnein (Johannesburg).* Online 2022.
7. Wikipedia. *Craighall Park (Johannesburg).* Online 2022.
8. Wikipedia. *De Havilland Tiger Moth.* Online 2022.
9. Wikipedia. *Ferndale (Gauteng).* Online 2022.
10. Wikipedia. *Robert Mugabe.* Online 2022.
11. Wikipedia. *Zanu-PF.* Online 2022.

8

That Day at Randfontein Station

Like all great travellers, I have seen more than I remember,
and remember more than I have seen.
[Benjamin Disraeli, 1804-1881].

South Africa is (also) a land of trains, train-transport, and travel by train. One invariably thinks of such great trains as South Africa's famous 'Blue Train' through which the beautiful landscapes of South Africa are annually showcased to the world, and Sishen Iron Mine's (i.e., Kumba Iron Mine's) ore-bearing waggons to Saldanha Bay on the West Coast of South Africa, an amazing feat of industrial innovation and determination.

The Sishen-Saldanha railway line is described as an 'Ore Export Line' and, at 861 km., described as a 'long heavy-haul railway line'. It does not carry passenger traffic and its ownership was transferred from Iscor (now 'Kumba Resources') to the government's 'Transnet Freight Rail' in 1977. The track gauge is 1.067m (3'6") and its operating speed 80 km/h. The technology employed is described as 'Radio Distributed Power' (RDP) and with its 8 locomotives (Voltage: 50 kV AC) and 342 waggons are considered, at the time of writing, the longest production train in the world. No doubt by now the abovementioned record has probably been broken (unofficially) many times over.

[Source: Wikipedia].

The 'Blue Train', on the other hand, is a luxury passenger-rail train described as follows:

> *"The Blue Train travels an approximately 1,600-kilometer (990 miles) journey in South Africa between Pretoria and Cape Town. It is one of the most luxurious train journeys in the world. It boasts butler service, two lounge cars (smoking and non-smoking), an observation car, and carriages with gold-tinted picture windows, in soundproofed, fully carpeted compartments, each featuring its own en-suite (many of which are equipped with a full-sized bathtub). The service is promoted as a magnificent 'moving five-star hotel' by its operators, who note that kings and presidents have travelled on it."*
>
> [Wikipedia].

In his book, *Great Trains: Luxury Rail Journeys of the World*, Timothy Wheaton, an inveterate American traveller form San Francisco, writes:

"No one, or at least few, doubts that the Blue Train is the most luxurious train in the world, with on-board suites of rooms a hallmark. This luxurious train has been operated since 1946, and if you take into account its predecessor, then luxury service Cape Town-Pretoria route has been continuous (with an exception for World War II) since 1903.

"This route was an extension of South Africa's first transcontinental railway, built to connect the diamond mines and the gold mines of the interior with the coastal cities of Cape Horn and Durban. The transcontinental line was completed on 10 October 1895, and it ran from Cape Town to Durban by way of Heidelberg, just south of Johannesburg. A feeder line was run to the gold-processing center of Johannesburg, continuing northward to Pretoria."

"The South African topography is quite rugged, and the line climbs from near sea level at Cape Town to 1748 metres (5735 feet) in altitude at Johannesburg, with some gradients as steep as one in 40. The line's builders deemed it wise to construct the whole of it in narrow gauge track,

which is 1067 mm (three feet, six inches) wide, to better negotiate construction this often-mountainous terrain."

[Wheaton: 75-76].

A special train, dubbed 'The White Train', was designated for Prince George, the Duke of Kent's visit to South Africa during the period 5 February to 10 April 1934. In 1947, the British royal family toured South Africa for three months, during which eight ivory-painted air-conditioned saloons from Britain were imported, three of which were built to Blue Train sleeping car standards, and with the remaining five (special) saloons designated for use by the royal family and Field Marshall Jan Smuts, prime minister of South Africa at the time.

Nevertheless, it so transpired that my uncle, GullusG., and I had to travel to Johannesburg from Randfontein, my hometown, one day. It was in 1960 and I was about 12 years old, and I was on my way to my grandparents' home for the school holidays. Our train was to depart, say at 3pm (although I stand to be corrected) and we arrived at the station well ahead of the time.

After we had bought our tickets, we settled down in the waiting room to wait for our train to arrive. Across the rows of railway tracks the row of little red-brick, storybook railway-houses situated in the railway station's coal-yard precinct (dwarfed by several gargantuan mounds of dumped coal) and where my father once had lived as a boy during the 1930s, were just barely visible.

Our waiting seemed in vain, however, for our train eventually, upon arrival, just did not appear to want to depart ever again at all. After we had settled down in our carriage with its so-called 'second-class' green leather seats, nothing further happened. We waited and waited, and eventually started devising all kinds of word games and riddles with which to amuse ourselves and pass the time. 'Nobody' from the station-authorities were saying 'nothing', and the only piece of communication worth considering was his advice to us from the stationmaster to be patient and wait.

Much later in the afternoon, after about two hours had passed, the conductor at last came along and started punching tickets. *"We're on the way, folks!"* A few minutes later the train gave a mighty heave and then started pulling out of the station to the relief of its exasperated passengers and crew. We arrived late at Park Station in Johannesburg that evening and took one of those red double-decker busses to Cottesloe where my grandparents lived.

It was not before the next day that we discovered that the reason our train had been delayed for so long the previous day was because the train in front of us, which had departed a little earlier on the same track, had derailed the previous afternoon at Roodepoort on the West Rand, an accident that may have ended in disaster had our train ill-advisedly anyway been allowed to continue, like so many impatient passengers had wished and clamoured for, with its journey to Johannesburg.

References

1. AngloAmericanKumba. *Kumba Iron Ore.* Online 2022.
2. Capetown.gov.za. *City of Cape Town.* Online 2022.
3. LuxuryTrainClub.com. *Blue Train Africa (South Africa).* Online 2022.
4. Sa-venues.com. *Heidelberg (Gauteng).* Online 2022.
5. TransnetFreightRail-tfr.net. *Transnet Freight Rail.* Online 2022.
6. WestCoastWay.co.za. *Saldanha.* Online 2022.
7. Wikipedia. *Distributed Power.* Online 2022.
8. Wikipedia. *Johannesburg Park Station.* Online 2022.
9. Wikipedia. *Multiple-Unit Train Control.* Online 2022.
10. Wikipedia. *Royal Train/SouthAfrica.* Online 2022.
11. Wikipedia. *San Francisco.* Online 2022.
12. Wikipedia. *Sishen-Saldanha Railway Line.* Online 2022.

9

My Friend from Witsieshoek

God defend me from my friends; from my enemies I can defend myself.
[Proverb, 16th Century].

In political circles today it is often said that, in such a highly politicised country as ours, black and white will never learn to work together for the common good of the country. However, before we jump to hasty conclusions or start running down others (the only physical exercise some people are inclined to get) let's listen to this story first.

During 1958 to 1959 we were living in Carletonville, a bustling mining town in South Africa. Our house in Kaolin Street was a plain 'mine bungalow', not far from the local 'Danie Theron Primary School' (one block south) which my brothers and I attended. About two blocks north of our home was a shopping centre known as the 'Old Town' of Carletonville, which, among others, also comprised a modern movie-theatre where the most memorable movies of my childhood at the time had played out.

Although the road to this theatre, the matinees of which my brothers and I had been attending most Saturday-afternoons ever since we arrived in Carletonville, was quite a taxing distance to walk if one were to follow the normal route around the block, my brothers and I had soon, upon arrival in Carletonville, discovered this little nook in the 6 ft. (about 2 metres) split-poles in the corner of our backyard where we could climb over and take a shortcut through a quaint little park toward the theatre, which took only about five minutes to negotiate.

Before reaching the park, however, there was this empty lot directly behind our house that first had to be crossed before the park could be reached, and on this empty lot such building materials as a heap of sand and gravel had apparently long ago been dumped and forgotten. It was here at this momentous spot that the drama of this story eventually finally unfolded.

Now bear in mind that, just for the sake of a little background-information for the reader, that those days in Carletonville during the years 1958 to 1959 were some of the pleasantest I had ever known. I was 10 years old going on 11, and just discovering at the 'Carleton Theatre' (today transformed into a general dealer shop) where such marvellous stories as *The Old Man and the Sea* (Spencer Tracy); *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (Gary Cooper & Ingrid Bergman); *The Inn of the 6th Happiness* (Ingrid Bergman); *Teacher's Pet* and *The Pyjama Game* (Doris Day); *The Man With the Golden Arm* (Frank Sinatra); *Interpol* (Victor Mature); *Zarak* (Victor Mature); *Yellowstone Kelly* (Clint Walker) and *Davy Crockett* (Fess Parker) among many others used to play out.

This lovely old airconditioned theatre with its magnificent 'Dolby stereo' was a haven of relaxation and recreation for kids my age, especially with those Saturday matinees and all the adventure stories with Roy Rogers, Charles Starrett, Randolph Scott, Gene Autrey, Audie Murphy, Clint Walker, Joel McCrea and Burn 'em up' Barnes.

There were other theatres too. An aunt of mine owned a drive-in theatre just outside town which we often frequented as a family. Memorable films that now immediately spring to mind were such classics as *How Green Was My Valley* (Walter Pidgeon & Maureen O' Hara); *Atilla the Hun* (Anthony Quinn); *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (Anthony Quinn); *Love Me Tender* (Elvis Presley); *There's No Business Like Show Business* (Marilyn Monroe); *Many Rivers to Cross* (Robert Taylor); *Hollywood or Bust* (Dean Martin & Jerry Lewis); *Tammy* (Debbie Reynolds); *Smiley* etc.

There was this one film, however, for which I was, psychologically, not prepared, and that was Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing's 1958 scary movie, *Dracula,* which had been showing at the

Carleton Theatre in 1959. Until then I had never ever before seen a horror movie, and, in the end, this one had apparently proved just a trifle too much too soon.

What happened was that, as I insisted to see the film, my unsuspecting mother had arranged for me to attend the Wednesday-afternoon matinee with her. However, as it had an age-restriction of 4-12 and I was only 11 at the time, she (bless her soul) had to give my age at the ticket-office as 12 to enable me to pass as 'old enough', an error in judgement I only discovered about an hour later when the movie finally commenced. Virtue has its own reward, and so does premature mischief ... like lying about one's age.

In his autobiography, *Lord of Misrule*, the late Sir Christopher Lee, who reportedly spoke seven languages fluently, writes that he bought his first Mercedes ever for £700 with the proceeds from that film. Little did I then know that he had toured just about every nook and cranny of South Africa as his brother, Fred, had been living in Johannesburg at the time and often would invite his brother for a round of golf in the 'tropics' midst the scent of blooming Jacarandas.

As an aspiring young RAF (Royal Air Force) pilot Sir Christopher Lee was, among others, stationed in Cape Town and Durban in South Africa during WW2, and was finally despatched to Hillside, Bulawayo in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) for further training as an aircraft (fighter) pilot in the war. As mentioned earlier, his unit-commander was Major Peter Venter, a South African and during this period he had also had the good fortune of meeting General (Field-Marshall) Smuts, a member of Winston Churchill's War Cabinet in Britain during WW1.

Nevertheless, I have seen many horror movies since, some good, some mediocre and some downright trashy (In fact, I detest the genre today) but that 1958 version of *Dracula* must surely go down in history as one of the finest in the Gothic-genre ever made, despite the glaring mistakes later discovered, such as the image of the Count reflected in the mirror that Harker saw while he stood shaving etc. (Vampires are supposed to 'reflect' invisibly in mirrors).

The point is that the movie scared the daylights out of me, and during the entire length of the film I had just about chewed my mother's little red plastic purse into smithereens. When we arrived at home that afternoon, I literally had to sleep between my two younger brothers for the next three months ... with the lights left on. When I exited the house, I walked out through the door backwards and when I came back in, I again entered the house backwards. I could go nowhere without the spectre of the Count following me wherever I went. Today I laugh at my childish naiveté of the time ... little did I then know that real life was, in more ways than one (for instance the *Holocaust*, the recent *Rwandan-atrocities* etc.) infinitely more dreadful and macabre than what that film or any one film, could wish to depict.

The one welcoming feature of course was that the Count was destroyed and beaten by Peter Cushing (in life one of Christopher Lee's best friends) brandishing the weapons of *light* and a *cross* as *Van Helsing* the vampire killer, i.e., the symbol of the Calvary Gospel and the supposed nemesis of any vampire, which, at the time, resonated particularly positively with me. By the way, in those days I liked the gaunt and anaemic Peter Cushing's films, as well as those of the suave Vincent Price, a lot.

In this house in Kaolin Street one of my hobbies was to collect all kinds of little reptiles prolific in the region, like for instance little silver lizards and brown geckos, which I used to catch by the dozens with my bare hands and then set up in a little (virtually empty) storeroom about 10 ft. x 10 ft. (3 m x 3 m) annexed to the garage.

When my mother walked in there one day and witnessed the outrageous extent of my diabolical biology experiment and immense collection of hideous beasts clambering and slithering all over the floor and scurrying up and down the walls, she emerged screaming blue murder. That was the end of my research as well as my guaranteed 'government' research-grants (weekly pocket money).

She then contrived a wicked strategy to regain jurisdiction over the empty storeroom by hiring a domestic servant for the house, which she set up in that storeroom for the duration of her

temporary tenure in Carletonville. She was a Sotho woman from Witsieshoek (pronounced 'Vit-sees-hook') and accompanying her was her young son of about my age, a Sotho boy also, like myself, named 'Piet' (pronounced 'Pete'). As a race they are classified as 'black', but the Sotho-people I know are not 'black' but have complexions that are rather of a copper hue, which could also be considered more light-brown than black.

Geopolitically they hail from the mountain-kingdom of Lesotho (the old 'Basutoland Protectorate' run previously by the British) and actually are a very handsome people; the sight of an 80-year old patriarch with his ancient grey beard and grey hair reclining on his 'Basuto-pony' (the same hardy and plucky little animal that had, used by the Boers, so brilliantly outperformed the Arabian-stallion of the British on the rugged terrain of South Africa during the Anglo-Boer War) and clad in his traditional 'Basuto-blanket' and his peculiar 'Basuto-hat' rendering him so 'Biblical' in appearance, never ceases to fascinate artist and anthropologist alike.

Nevertheless, it was friendship at first sight between her son and I, almost like the friendship between David and Jonathan. To mimic Kirk Douglas and Burt Lancaster, 'we liked each other's cut', and we struck off a friendship immediately. We played together, wrestled together, boxed together and, when the need for innovation arose, we cut up our hula-hoops (a worldwide craze in 1959 probably started earlier, among others, by the graceful swimmer Esther Williams) to make some homemade swords to combat each other in an admixture of medieval fencing and traditional African stick-fighting.

I had earlier, with my usual flair for amateurish technical innovation, discovered that a hula-hoop cut into three even pieces made a useful (and safe) Arabian 'sabre' for 12-year-old kids to duel with. We were lucky, for we had some green as well as some blue ones.

Bear in mind that Sotho custom demands that boys, who often at home had to be left alone with herds of cattle to tend in the field, are taught the art of stick-fighting from a very young age to know how to protect the 'family fortune', as a herd of cattle often than not may have represented such a family's entire fortune for life. My friend Piet, I soon discovered, was no pushover with the 'sabre'.

Many years later, after I had grown up, my mother told me how she, during many a summer afternoon, had stood at the lace curtains of a lounge-window and smiled while I shadow-boxed imaginary enemies or wrestled with my friend Piet on the lawn outside. We were bosom friends ... period.

There was, however, a serious 'complication' beginning to rear its ugly, woolly-minded, and hairy-skulled head as ominous black clouds of war were beginning to rise and rumble big time. You see, during that period, I had had two other friends as well, which I will refer to as 'Wally' and 'Bobby' (aliases) who also lived in the neighbourhood. From time to time, I had also been hanging out with them, and they surely must have noticed the added 'Sotho' dimension to my life with growing concern.

I mean, if it hadn't been bad enough for me already for sometimes shadow-boxing imaginary foes outside in the yard, a source of no little amusement for my mother, the rest of the family and passers-by in the street, how bad had it not now grown now that I was seen playing with a friend from such a different background, culture ... and race?

So, one late afternoon, my 'friend' Wally knocked on our backdoor where we were quietly having dinner (scrambled eggs on toast) in the kitchen and asked my father:

"*Uncle Piet, may Piet please come and play with us?*" (Obviously, 'us' meaning himself, i.e., the chubby Wally and his 'comrade-in-crime', the skinny Bobby, as they were cousins and always seen together in the neighbourhood). Looking back up at my dad sitting opposite me, and just about finishing my lunch, my dad graciously replied:

"*Sure, as soon as he had finished his dinner, okay?*"

"Okay ... thanks uncle Piet!" and then, looking at me:

"Piet, Bobby and I will be waiting for you on the empty lot behind your house." Wally said.

"Okay!" I replied. "*I'll see you guys just now!"* suddenly feeling incredibly significant and indispensable and an important cog in the wheel of the upper echelons of elitist primary school society.

It was about five minutes later when I clambered over the fence to where my two friends were waiting for me on a neglected stack of blue stone gravel. I was curious as to what they had been planning for us to do and walked over to them briskly in anticipation of the afternoon's activities. Were they going fishing? Or swimming, perhaps? What about tennis ... what were these guys up to?

When I arrived at the stack of gravel, they were standing there looking a trifle more sombre and menacing than usual. Maybe they had had a run-in with their parents ... whatever it was; things suddenly did not look so upbeat anymore.

The next moment Wally lunged at me, grabbing me and at the same time whirling around and flinging me like a ragdoll all over the gravel. In the meantime, Bobby had also entered the fray and was also beginning to inveigh loudly against me for some imaginary crime while at the same time joining Wally in the general assault on my person with the clear intent to inflict grievous bodily harm.

To say that I was shocked or bitterly disappointed would be a crude understatement ... in fact, I was shocked and terrified. To be attacked by your friends, en masse, out of the blue and without any logical reason or warning whatsoever, was not my idea of fun.

At first, I thought that they were teasing, or putting up a charade, for Wally had a big, fat, diabolical smirk on his face, but I soon realised that it was no act. The attacks were beginning to increase in intensity and scope, and there were no guarantees that it was going to abate anytime soon.

It is strange, however, when the chips are down how much strength the human anatomy can muster during such an altercation, as my entire physique suddenly began surge with energy and raw power, perhaps more because of outrage and indignation than courage, probably better explained by the 'fight or flight' impulse.

Some hunters and explorers who may have had the experience of being mauled by a lion, say that one, because of the shock, does not feel any pain, and I also, mysteriously, at that moment felt no pain ... only blind fury. I flung the skinny Bobby against the ground and punched vehemently at Wally, a nice, open target, leaving them suddenly dazed and surprised.

"You bastards!" I bellowed.

The tables were beginning to turn, for their superiority in numbers had made them overconfident, complacent and sluggish, while I was 'fighting for my life'. After all, my friend Piet, the boy from Witsieshoek, and I had inadvertently (but quite fortuitously) been preparing for this day Spartan-like for months! To be honest, my sudden explosion into an uncontrolled rage in reaction to their unanticipated duplicity and betrayal (the boxer's 'killer-instinct'?) scared even myself.

Then a 'miracle' happened ... out of the corner of my eye I suddenly caught a glimpse of my chum from Witsieshoek, Piet, leaping over the split-pole fence of our yard with a loud whistle of affront; he had heard the commotion and, outraged, now parachuted in with a vengeance ... how dared they attack his buddy?!

So, although thin and sinewy, this hardy specimen of an 11-year-old Sotho-boyhood joined in the ranks of the combating throng with the wild abandon of a rugby-forward burrowing into a scrum, and then the sparks just seemed to start flying all over Carletonville. In the end, they were no match against the two of us, and, as soon as they saw a gap, the cowards, chubby Wally and skinny Bobby, broke loose and ran as fast as their treacherous little limbs could carry them back home to mommy.

In the aftermath (and in retrospect) the unpleasant incident had clearly shown that, when push came to shove, it evidently was not skin-colour or race that were the variables that decided primary loyalties, but alliances founded on the noble principals of mutual respect, proven friendships and shared values derived from the sacred moral principle of 'Universal Fair Play', i.e., C.S. Lewis' 'Natural Law' from 'Mere Christianity'.

Sadly, when, sometime later, I came home from school one day, Piet and his mother had already departed for Witsieshoek that morning. There room was empty, as they unexpectedly had to return to their ancestral home near Lesotho without delay. There were no polite goodbyes or final farewells. It was the end of an era, and my heart suddenly felt inexplicably cheerless without my companion, the summer afternoons gloomy. I was about four years older than my brother HansS., an immense cultural gap in age in childhood. By the end of that year, we were to move again, back to Randgate. That was over sixty-three years ago at the time of writing, and I never saw my Sotho-friend, Piet the Sotho boy, ever again.

References

1. Britannica.com. *Basuto (People).* Online 2022.
2. Britannica.com. *Holocaust.* Online 2022.
3. Britannica.com. *Phuthaditjhaba (Witsieshoek).* Online 2022.
4. Britannica.com. *Royal Air Force.* Online 2022.
5. CSLewis.com. *About C.S. Lewis.* Online 2022.
6. Wikipedia. *Basuto Pony.* Online 2022.
7. Wikipedia. *Basutoland.* Online 2022.
8. Wikipedia. *Carletonville.* Online 2022.
9. Wikipedia. *Danie Theron.* Online 2022.
10. Wikipedia. *Gothic Fiction.* Online 2022.
11. Wikipedia. *Mere Christianity (Book).* Online 2022.
12. Wikipedia. *Nguni Stick-Fighting.* Online 2022.
13. Wikipedia. *Rwanda.* Online 2022.
14. Wikipedia. *Sotho People.* Online 2022.
15. Wikipedia. *War Cabinet.* Online 2022.

10

Wonderland by Night

Society is now one polished horde, formed of two mighty tribes, the Bores and Bored.
[Lord Byron, 1788-1824].

Children love fantasy, and from childhood we were introduced to legends, myths and fairy tales. When I asked my mother in 1951 where I had come from, she answered:

"You were a monkey in the mountain and so one day we went out to set a trap for you, we caught you, cut off your tail and brought you home to live with us."

Although a blatant and an outright lie, it nevertheless sounded better than the silly old fairy tale about the stork. From early childhood I can remember visiting my grandparents' home in Johannesburg, first in Braamfontein where they have been living in Biccard Street, and later in Cottesloe, close to Auckland Park, where they later have been living in 26 Herald Street. In Braamfontein my grandparents' house was not very far from the vegetable market at the Newmarket theatre complex, today a popular entertainment venue.

During the earlier part of this century, my wife and I were present at the new Newmarket (suspension) Bridge in Braamfontein when Nelson Mandela presided over the inauguration of the bridge. We were non-participating guests as part of about three to five-thousand athletes (my daughter included) who were running a half-marathon type of race in the vicinity that day.

At 26 Herald Street my grandparents had been living in an old 'Edwardian prefab' since about 1950. This was an interesting house, as it had been imported by British soldiers during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 as an officers' mess and later used as a military hospital for the wounded Tommies. Hundreds of these buildings were auctioned off to the public after the war, and the entire Herald Street, indeed large sections of Auckland Park, Brixton and other suburbs were showcases of the architectural gems from this era, of which 'Lindfield House Victorian Museum', beautifully preserved, as well as the 'Smuts House', in Irene, immediately spring to mind.

As little children we used to roam all over the suburb to get a peek into these stately, foreboding houses. They were spacious with large rooms, high ceilings and decorative little fireplaces. Hot-water boilers (geysers) were driven either by coal-stoves or gas-stoves. My grandparents' house, as was the case with most of the houses built on an incline, had a 'cellar' where all kinds of items usually were stored, although some house-owners had converted these cellars into attractive and highly functional mechanical workshops. A favourite past-time of some of the 'juvenile' adults was to lock us children into the cellar, a terrifying, life-changing experience for a small child.

As a child I used to believe that Johannesburg, the 'City of Gold', was 'Hollywood'. It was only later in high school that I came to the realisation that most people in Hollywood had probably never even heard of a place like Johannesburg. There reportedly is, however, a town in Kern County, California, USA named after Johannesburg, apparently because of some mild form of a gold-rush that once had taken place there. It is reportedly also referred to as 'Joburg' in sympathy with Joburg (Johannesburg) in South Africa. In the Californian Johannesburg, the 'Randsburg Railway' was operative from 1897 to 1933:

> *"Johannesburg is a census-designated place (CDP) in Kern County, California, in a mining district of the Rand Mountains. Johannesburg is located 1 mile (1.6 km) east-northeast of Randsburg,[5] at an elevation of 3,517 feet (1,072 m).[1] The terminus of the Randsburg*

Railway was here from 1897 to 1933. The population was 172 at the 2010 census, down from 176 at the 2000 census. Johannesburg is divided from the neighboring community of Randsburg by a ridge. The town is frequently referred to as "Jo-burg" by locals and frequent visitors to the northwest Mojave."

[Wikipedia].

During Christmas times the children from Cottesloe and other suburbs like Richmond etc. were often invited to the Christmas celebrations at the 'Cottesloe Old Age Home' in the area. At one of those events my mother and her sister-in-law, who had chaperoned us to the celebrations, joined in song with the local heartthrob couple of the time, the vivacious redhead, Virginia Lee and pianist Archie Selenski; the song they regaled us with on that day was Virginia Lee's popular, *'Ten Thousand Miles'.* I once, however, had to skip an invitation to the Coca Cola® factory's Christmas Celebrations at the Coca Cola® factory in Richmond due to a nasty bout of hay fever.

My memories of attending the 'Vorentoe High School' in 1961, however, were marred years later by the bus tragedy involving the pupils from that school today known as the 'Westdene Bus Tragedy':

"The Westdene dam disaster was a bus accident that took place in Westdene, near Johannesburg, South Africa, on 27 March 1985. The driver of a double decker bus lost control and the bus crashed through barriers into the Westdene dam, about three miles from the centre of Johannesburg. A witness said it appeared a tire blew out, sending the bus swerving into another vehicle before it smashed through a fence and plunged into the reservoir. The bus was transporting students from the local high school (Hoërskool Vorentoe).

"About 3,000 people, including dozens of tearful parents, gathered near the scene as doctors and nurses battled to revive children pulled from the submerged bus. Police said 39 students drowned in the bus and two died later in hospital. Children traveling in another bus said some students trapped on the upper deck managed to break windows and swim to safety."

[Wikipedia].

Johannesburg is a beautiful city founded on a chain of hills with lots of precipitous drives and rides, not unlike San Francisco although very industrialised. Even Bruce Wilkinson, author of the bestselling book, *The Prayer of Jabez* and who used to visit Johannesburg on regular basis, has acknowledged it as 'a quaint' little city. The last time he was in Johannesburg it was to launch his movie *'Beat the Drum'.* Durban (at the coast) has the same kind of topography.

Favourite haunts (by decent people) in those days were the Emmarentia Dam and the Zoo Lake in Parktown. Johannesburg has a magnificent, historic zoo with some splendid lions, and just around the corner is an historic World War 1 & World War 2 memorial and museum. Suburbs like Parktown still contain some magnificent historical homes from the era of the 'Randlords' like Cecil John Rhodes, Barney Barnato, Abe Bailey and J.B. Robinson etc.:

"Randlords were the entrepreneurs who controlled the diamond and gold mining industries in South Africa in its pioneer phase from the 1870s up to World War I. A small number of European adventurers and financiers, largely of the same generation, gained control of the diamond mining industry at Kimberley, Northern Cape. They set up an infrastructure of financing and industrial consolidation which they then applied to exploit the discoveries of gold from 1886 in Transvaal at Witwatersrand – the 'Rand'. Once based in the Transvaal many set up residence in the mansions of Parktown. Many of the Randlords received baronetcies from Queen Victoria in recognition of their contributions."

[Wikipedia].

As mentioned earlier, during the Easter celebrations as well as during Christmas and New Year the anti-aircraft spotlights at Milner Park used to beam their lights thirty kilometres into the sky, so reminiscent of the 20th Century Fox movie-logo. During 'Old Year's Eve' dances the adults used to dance the hours away to the accompaniment of Glenn Miller's 'In the Mood' and 'Moonlight Serenade' (and some Benny Goodman's numbers too).

Now I have been to many a gorgeous show in my lifetime, especially where music is concerned. I've seen Liberace on that enormous Steinway piano with the Dr. Gordon Robinson symphony-ensemble backing him up, at the His Majesty's theatre in Johannesburg (now demolished) twice. I've seen James Last and his band and attended the legendary Bill Gaither's Homecoming singing in Randburg. This was great music, provided of course one is into that kind of music.

About two years ago we went to see Andre Rieu and his Johann Strauss orchestra at the 'Dome' in South Africa to celebrate my wife's birthday, and what a charming evening we had.

On the other hand have I always enjoyed music on the micro-level as well, like listening to *'Summer Wind'* when I am lounging around at home; *'Wish You Were Here'* when it's raining cats and dogs you're missing a dear friend or a family member; *'Vaya Con Dios'* when you're in love and the two of you have to part; '*Mama Sang A Song'* when you're 14 years old and living with your grandparents in Johannesburg, far away from your family in Virginia; *'Cowboys Don't Cry'* when you're six years old and too frightened to go to school for the first time.

Old soldiers returning home from World War 2 used to freak out at the sound of *The Last Time I Saw Paris*, and some Englishmen claim that, after 1945 and the demise of the Hitler-regime, there could not be found a sound more exquisite than the cacophony of London taxis on a busy day.

One particularly delightful moment was some time ago when we were holidaying in Pennington near Durban where they have this little restaurant on the beach there that serves the most delectable of Sunday lunches. What a joy it had been to sit down to such a lunch with the waves breaking on the rocks fifty metres away and with clarinettist Acker Bilk playing *'Stranger on the Shore'* in the background. It was as magical as any staged movie-setting.

The most memorable night of my life as a child, especially where music was concerned, was however when had our little private picnic one evening at the Zoo Lake in Parktown where the wealthy families of the privileged 'Randlords' decades ago used to hang out in the early days of Johannesburg. It was a beautiful spring afternoon and evening, with thousands of agitated finches either in argument or in in jubilation, boats on the lake and children playing on the lawns in the deep shadows of massive trees. JeanetteG., FrikkieG., my uncle GullusG. and I were there, just revelling in the simple, chocolate-box charms of the setting, where willows grew profusely on an island in the lake populated prolifically with all kinds of birdlife and 'resident' ducks and geese.

After nightfall that afternoon, and after the automated fountain had begun to gush its jets of water high up into the sky in all the phantasmagorical colours of the rainbow against the diamond-studded backdrop of the navy sky, Murray Campbell came over the air playing his version of the immortal little trumpet-solo, *'Wonderland by Night'.*

No decent song is, however, bereft of its sad, ever-present 'minor keys': Uncle GullusG. has now gone with his throat cut one night by a burglar who had come to steal his car; FrikkieG. has gone, having succumbed to some serious stomach ailment, if not actually cancer; and my dearest childhood-friend, JeanetteG. ('Nettie') has also gone, the victim of totally incapacitating kidney-cancer.

Going on 75 and in the sunset-season of my nondescript life, my *'Wonderland by Night'* (originally by Bert Kaempfert) magic will only return (if ever) only if the dear Lord's providence graciously will allow for me to once more gaze upon the countenances of these long-lost friends (and the many others too) in Eternity one day.

References

1. AllAboutPrayer.org. *Prayer of Jabez.* Online 2022.
2. AndreRieu.com. *André Rieu.* Online 2022.
3. Britannica.com. *20th Century Fox.* Online 2022.
4. Britannica.com. *Christmas.* Online 2022.
5. BruceWilkinson.com. *Tap Into Your Greatest Potential.* Online 2022.
6. CinemaTreasures.org. *His Majesty's Theatre (Johannesburg).* Online 2022.
7. IMDb. *Houseboat, 1958 (Film).* Online 2022.
8. Kerncounty.com. *Kern County (CA).* Online 2022.
9. NelsonMandela.org. *Biography of Nelson Mandela.* Online 2022.
10. Newmarket.co.za. *Newmarket Precinct (Johannesburg).* Online 2022.
11. SA-venues.com. *Emmerentia Dam (Gauteng).* Online 2022.
12. SA-venues.com. *Lindfield Victorian House Museum (Auckland Park, Johannesburg).* Online 2022.-
13. SA-venues.com. *Westdene (Johannesburg).* Online 2022.
14. SmutsHouse.co.za. *Smuts House.* Online 2022.
15. Vories.co.za. *Vorentoe High School.* Online 2022.
16. Wikipedia. *Abe Bailey.* Online 2022.
17. Wikipedia. *Acker Bilk.* Online 2022.
18. Wikipedia. *An Affair to Remember.* Online 2022.
19. Wikipedia. *Barney Barnato.* Online 2022.
20. Wikipedia. *Beat the Drum (Film).* Online 2022.
21. Wikipedia. *Bill Gaither (Gospel Singer).* Online 2022.
22. Wikipedia. *Cecil Rhodes.* Online 2022.
23. Wikipedia. *Edwardian Era.* Online 2022.
24. Wikipedia. *Gaither Homecoming.* Online 2022.
25. Wikipedia. *Hollywood.* Online 2022.
26. Wikipedia. *Irene (Gauteng).* Online 2022.
27. Wikipedia. *Johann Strauss I.* Online 2022.
28. Wikipedia. *Johann Strauss II.* Online 2022.
29. Wikipedia. *Johannesburg (California).* Online 2022.
30. Wikipedia. *Liberace.* Online 2022.
31. Wikipedia. *Mama Sang a Song (Song).* Online 2022.
32. Wikipedia. *Parktown (Johannesburg).* Online 2022.
33. Wikipedia. *Pennington (Kwazulu-Natal).* Online 2022.
34. Wikipedia. *Randburg (RSA).* Online 2022.
35. Wikipedia. *Randlord.* Online 2022.
36. Wikipedia. *Randsburg Railway (California).* Online 2022.
37. Wikipedia. *Richmond (Johannesburg).* Online 2022.
38. Wikipedia. *Sir Joseph Robinson.* Online 2022.
39. Wikipedia. *South African National Museum of Military History (Johannesburg).* Online 2022.
40. Wikipedia. *Stranger on the Shore (Song).* Online 2022.
41. Wikipedia. *The Deadly Mantis (Film).* Online 2022.
42. Wikipedia. *The Incredible Shrinking Man (Film).* Online 2022.
43. Wikipedia. *The Last Time I Saw Paris (Song).* Online 2022.
44. Wikipedia. *Virginia (Free State).* Online 2022.
45. Wikipedia. *Westdene Dam Disaster.* Online 2022.
46. Wikipedia. *Wonderland by Night (Song).* Online 2022.
47. Zoolake.org. *Zoo Lake (Johannesburg).* Online 2022.

11

Battle at the 'K.O. Corral'

Military glory ... the attractive rainbow that rises in showers of blood.
[Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1865].

As a child, and among friends, the question often used to come up ... boxing or wrestling? In other words, which one of the two disciplines or types of sports would, kilogram-for-kilogram or pound-for-pound, produce the most lethal warrior?

Now bear in mind that those were the days when martial-arts by such modern exponents (and movie-stars) as Chuck Norris, Stephen Seagal and Jean-Claude van Damme were still far removed in the future. Although the ancient sports of self-defence from the orient in most respects a most commendable art or science, it came to the West relatively 'late'. I mean, just notice the glaring absence of serious martial-arts routines in most of the earlier James Bond films. Introducing contemporary martial-arts routines into 'Westerns' are, however, painfully anachronistic and inauthentic, and should be outlawed or allowed to be shown only on pain of the death-sentence for the producers.

In my day as a youngster, the only real 'martial-arts' we were familiar with was Judo, or Ju-Jitsu, and, although I admire the art or science of (authentic, contemporary) martial-arts, I am not impressed by the way in which it has lately been manipulated (tweaked) in films by computer-graphics experts to look even more impressive than it is. It is superficial, fake, plastic and not fun at all. Scriptwriters in Hollywood writing such trash should be shipped to Alcatraz for life, whether the fortress has been decommissioned and downgraded into a tourist attraction by the authorities or not.

Hollywood (and I suppose most patrons too) these days are all so pathologically obsessed with 'special effects' that, in the process of pursuing excellence in technical (computerised) 'special-effects', many a plain, simple but very good and (potentially) moving story usually is completely lost. Scriptwriters are apparently increasingly losing sight of the human element in films; I think that by opting for 'five-star special effects' (like the latest 'Star Wars' series of movies) they have settled for superficial, one-star storylines that are nothing more than a prohibitively expensive, animated science-fiction comic.

Maybe it has a lot to do with the sickening emergence of the relatively new field of *Transhumanism* which they are trying to ram as a valid, sustainable philosophy, down the gullible viewers' throats. Their 'special effects' often are not so special after all, and the era of ludicrous, far-fetched third-rate science-fiction and disingenuous, juvenile ghost-chronicles have just about reached an all-time saturation point. No five-star computer-driven 'special-effects' will ever compensate for an implausible, unrealistic storyline marinated in a the shallow, pathetic computer-technology driven script, no matter how 'brilliant' technically.

Nevertheless, boxing or wrestling? How does one answer such a question? I am not sure that an answer to such a question even exists! Bear in mind that we all probably have, as boys, had our heroes, macho-men and role models to emulate. I wonder, for instance, how many people today know how strong Abraham Lincoln, the famous American president, reportedly was. In his book, *Life of Lincoln,* William H. Herndon[88] writes:

> "*He was now six foot four inches high, and weighed, as his friend and confidant, William Greene, tells us with impressive precision, 'two-hundred and fourteen pounds.'*
>
> *The contest was to be a friendly and fairly conducted. All New Salem adjourned to the scene of the wrestle. Money, whiskey, knives, and all manner of property were staked on the result.*

It is unnecessary to go into the details of the encounter. Everyone knows how it ended; how at last the tall and angular rail-splitter, enraged at the suspicion of foul tactics, and profiting by his height and the length of his arms, fairly lifted the great bully by the throat and shook him like a rag; how by this act he established himself solidly in the esteem of all New Salem, and secured the respectful admiration and friendship of the very man whom he had so thoroughly vanquished."

[Herndon: 103-104].

William H. Herndon continues:

"*Mr. Lincoln's remarkable strength resulted not so much from muscular power as from the toughness of his sinews. He could not only lift from the ground enormous weight, but could throw a cannon-ball or a maul farther than anyone else in Salem."*

[Herndon: 104].

"No little of Lincoln's influence with the men of New Salem can be attributed to his extraordinary strength. By an arrangement of ropes and straps, harnessed about his hips, he was enabled one day at the mill to astonish a crowd of village celebrities by lifting a box of stones weighing near a thousand pounds."

[Herndon: 132-133].

I now wish to confine the conversation to our local South African heroes: Boxers, wrestlers, athletes etc., like the earliest South African marathon-runners Wally Hayward and Jan Barnard (a specialist in cross-country), champions of the gruelling ultra-marathons such as the 'Comrades'. Then followed the boxer Mike Holt, and as a strapping young 10-year-old I had his picture stuck up on the inside of my clothes-cupboard for months.

There were other greats like the heavyweight giant Evert Potgieter, a guy who stood 7'2' (218.4 cm.) in his socks and for a time probably could lick just about every other heavyweight in the world. He became disenchanted with boxing after losing some fights due to the peculiar health problems associated with his size and with his doctors objecting that his kidneys were being pummelled to smithereens by the smaller guys.

During the early sixties a source of tremendous pride for our family was when, during the early 1960s, my cousin and namesake, Piet ('Henny boy') S., as a high-school boy ran the one-mile race at an athletics competition in Pretoria in 4 minutes and 32 seconds flat, no mean feat for a schoolboy in those days, although he only had taken third place. At the time he was about five years older than I was.

South Africa has, over the years, produced some fine world-class athletes e.g., Judge Jefferies & Paul Nash (Sprint); Fanie van Zijl, Johan Fourie (Middle-distance) and Jan Barnard, Wally Hayward & Bruce Fordyce (Ultra-marathons etc.).

Wally Hayward has won the 'Comrades' ultra-marathon five times; Bruce Fordyce, nine times. No sprinter, in my book, has ever run in the proverbial 'symphony-in-motion' style, as gracefully as Edward ('Judge') Jefferies. His 'African Mirror' newsreel movie-clip, 220-yards/200 metres sprinting-scene used to enthral audiences in theatres for many years on end.

Then there were the well-known boxers such as Hottie van Heerden (south-paw); Pierre Fourie; Willie Ludick; Charlie Weir; the burly Mike ('The Tank') Schutte; Gerrie 'Bomber' Coetzee (who once wrested a world title from Leon Spinks); Kallie Knoetze; Bennie Knoetze; Johnny du Plooy; Pierre Coetzer and Corrie ('The Sniper') Sanders, also a lefty.

A talented young boxer, Brian Baronet, regrettably died in the ring due to injuries sustained in the ring, but guys like Vic Toweel, Brian Mitchell and 'Baby Jake' Matlala (reportedly the only boxer capable of milking a cow standing upright) went on to achieve world fame and acclaim.

The gutsy Brian Mitchell was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 2009, while the indefatigable and late 'Baby Jake' Matlala (big poison in a small bottle) was adulated by audiences from townships all over South Africa. By 1998 South Africa had no less than eight world champions on the books.

Heavyweights I enjoyed watching most were Mike Schutte, Johnny du Plooy, Pierre Coetzer and Corrie Sanders. People often say that boxing is 'a sports by hooligans for hooligans', but I beg to differ. What I like about most boxers in general is their usually guileless, unpretentious approach to life. Apart from their antics in the ring or during press conferences (but not necessarily always), in private they really are some of the most likeable people on earth; and a dedicated boxer in prime condition surely must be one of the fittest athletes in the world. The objection is often voiced, *"But it is such a dangerous, risky sport!"* I agree wholeheartedly ... and so are war, rugby, parachute-jumping, abseiling, mining and firefighting.

I saw Willie Ludick during the 1980s while he (after his retirement) was preaching in Vereeniging, South Africa and he went on to become a relatively fine public speaker in his own right, with a solid Christian ministry in his field. Also, I recently, while standing in our little local mall chatting to a man already quite 'advanced in years' (in other words, he was about my age), remarking positively on the variety of products that were on sale that morning at the monthly flea-market, the conversation eventually drifted to boxing, and it was not long before I realised that my amiable host was none other than Hottie van Heerden, the (erstwhile) much-feared 'south-paw' (left-hander) from Pretoria. Sadly, the death of my 'newly found friend' was announced in the local newspaper only a few months later; strange how many good new friends have a habit of dying on me.

About three years ago I was queuing for lunch in the cafeteria of the firm in Randburg (Johannesburg) where I had been employed as a subcontractor in corporate training for some time when I also, on that day, had had the privilege of meeting the gentle, soft-spoken Pierre Coetzer, once heavyweight champion of South Africa, who was attending a training workshop in the lecture room adjacent to where I was presenting mine.

In his prime Pierre, who, like the late Corrie Sanders, played a solid round of golf, used to be one of those tall, dedicated boxers with a Spartan-like exercising regime on the road as well as in the gymnasium. Although (officially) retired, on that day he still looked immensely fit, and I was particularly struck by his meticulous manners and disciplined social demeanour, probably the result of his long years of service in the South African Police Services.

Pierre Coetzer was eventually stopped in his tracks to boxing glory by the American George Foreman, by then already 42 years old, which ought to give an indication of the formidable boxer the American must have been in his (true) prime. When Foreman stopped Pierre on a technical knockout after only two rounds into their bout, he had stopped what certainly must have been one of the fittest and superbly conditioned athletes and heavyweights in South African boxing history.

Pierre again went on to relinquish his South African title to Corrie ('The Sniper') Sanders, another prolific and formidable 'south-paw' (left-hander) who, parachuted in at the eleventh hour to replace another opponent who did not pitch, became famous overnight for knocking out Vladimir Klitschko on 8 March 2003 in Hanover, Germany, according to Ring Magazine one of the biggest upsets to date in recent world heavyweight history.

Reportedly in retirement, Corrie was murdered in cold blood by four Zimbabwean (armed) robbers in South Africa while enjoying dinner with his family in a restaurant in Brits ... he is still sorely missed by family, friends and members of the boxing fraternity far and wide. This incident highlighted the scourge of the high levels of violent crime in South Africa and the lack in political will with our government to really do something constructively about it.

People used to enjoy watching Mike ('the Tank') Schutte, a boxer resembling a giant steam locomotive in boxing shorts, mostly for his frightening, yet entertaining boxing-style. Mike was,

satirically speaking, one of those heavy-boned 'Neanderthal' types who often must have scared the daylights out of his opponent simply by having the audacity to climb through the ropes of the ring in the first place. When he came at an opponent with those mammoth arms flailing like a windmill out of control, my first instincts always were to fear for his poor opponent's life.

During the 1980s, while working at the steel manufacturing company in my then hometown of Vanderbijlpark where Mike also at the time was employed, a rumour one day emerged that Mike had slapped a big mouth, belligerent troublemaker at a party ... the man apparently had to be taken to hospital to have his dislocated jaw wired up by a doctor. Readers still acquainted with WW2 heavy armaments may try to imagine one of those tanks specially fitted with flailing landmine-clearing chains in the front with which the beaches of Normandy in France were invaded on D-day ... that was what Mike Schutte looked like when he boxed. He is still sorely missed for bringing some colour into local boxing.

The critics' favourite objection to Mike's career in general was that, when he was a boxer, he was inclined to get into a wrestling match with his opponent instead, and later, when he switched over to wrestling, he was inclined to start boxing his opponent, although perhaps inadvertently. Old habits die hard, and whether these objections could be justified professionally I do not know, but they were validated by my (amateur) observations.

One redeeming feature about the late Mike Schutte was that, in life, he apparently was quite a fun person to know. Just like those Chuck Norris jokes have earned him a cult-following all over the world, Mike has earned himself a cult-following in South Africa with his jokes, some often outrageously hilarious, about himself in his own right. Of all people he himself surely must have enjoyed those jokes most, most of them naturally at his own expense. Here is one:

Mike (In his GP's consulting rooms): "*I have not been feeling well lately Doc, what do you suggest I do?*"

Doctor: *"After having examined you, I suggest that you take your vitamins more regularly, make sure you adhere to a balanced diet and run at least three kilometres every day of your life, except maybe on Sundays, when you can take a welcome day off."*

[Three months later the GP walks into Mike's wife in town].

Doctor: *"Morning Mrs. S., good to see you! How has Mike been lately? Is he taking his vitamins as I have prescribed?"*

Mrs. S.: *"Yes Doctor, he is taking his vitamins, exactly as you prescribed!"*

Doctor: *"Is he adhering to a balanced diet as I prescribed?"*

Mrs. S. *"Yes Doctor, he is adhering to a balanced diet, exactly as you prescribed!"*

Doctor: "*Has he been jogging three kilometres every day as I recommended?"*

Mrs. S.: *"Yes Doctor, he has been jogging three kilometres every day of his life ever since that day he came to see you, exactly as you recommended!"*

Doctor: "*And how has he been lately?"*

Mrs. S.: *"Doctor, he is doing just fine ... yesterday, when he called to say hello and report his progress, it was from a public phone in Langebaan on the West Coast. He is now already on his way to Springbok!"*

The most enigmatic and picturesque of heavyweights (but not necessarily technically the 'best') in South African boxing, as far as I am concerned, was the late Johnny du Plooy, who some were inclined to label a 'street fighter'. He was seen by most as a maverick-type of boxer who reportedly shunned the gym and exercise like the plague. He played at the sports of boxing like a cowboy, shooting nonchalantly from the hip and, surprisingly, hitting the target more often than not.

Apparently, he didn't mind roadwork, however, or chopping wood and sparring. He packed a fearful punch, moved like lightning and even knocked out the muscular Mike ('Hercules') Weaver (only one among the 21 other KO's) in a rematch at Sun City. Had he been a serious athlete he might have gone much further. After Pierre Coetzer had stopped him in a title match, he went on to become a successful trainer in his own right. I personally think that his demise as a boxer can be ascribed to his lack of enthusiasm for physical exercise and absence of the true, Spartan-like athletic dedication to the sport. His idea of preparation for his (successful) rematch with the formidable Mike Weaver for instance, was (satirically speaking) hang-gliding over the lake at Sun City.

On the more sombre side, my mother recently related to us the story of Robey Leibbrandt, a very successful South African boxer who had beaten all his opponents during the 1936 Berlin Olympics and during which he also had made such an impression on Adolf Hitler as the ideal (so-called) ideal 'Aryan type' that he was persuaded by the Nazis to join their organisation. Of German origin on his father's side (explaining the typical Germanic surname of 'Leibbrandt') he was found to be sympathetic toward Nazism, and after six months of preparation and Nazi indoctrination, returned to South Africa with the Nazi-mission of assassinating General Jan Smuts (later Field-Marshall, compliments of Winston Churchill), the then Prime Minister of South Africa.

When my mother came to visit us in Centurion at Christmas (December 2013) I drove her out to the Wierda Bridge on the Old Johannesburg Road where Robey Leibbrandt was apprehended and arrested by the Secret Service in the early 1940s. He was sentenced to death for high treason, but his sentenced was commuted to 'life' in 1943 by the very person he had come to kill, i.e., General Jan Smuts. In 1948, the National Party under Prime Minister Daniel Malan, which stood sympathetic toward the Hitler-regime, released Leibbrandt under some general amnesty-clause, and he apparently died unrepentant of his fascist views in 1968.

In those days Nazi-sympathizers were a dime a dozen and organisations like the 'Ossewa Brandwag' had to be constantly monitored for trouble. Another interesting piece of trivia was that (the late) actor Cary Grant had spied for the Allies during WW2 and was instrumental in the then exposing of (the late) movie star Errol Flynn, the swashbuckling Ozzie swordfighter of the forties, as an active Nazi-sympathizer.

Nevertheless, during his controversial conversion to Nazism, Robey Leibbrandt had also teamed up with such a Nazi-sympathizer in South Africa as the prolific wrestler Johannes van der Walt, who, on the day of his capture, was being pursued by the police in the streets of Johannesburg where my mother at the time was living with her family as a 12-year-old girl in the suburb of Craighall Park. The wrestler Van der Walt reportedly was chased right through my mother's yard and over the fence where he was eventually apprehended and shot, invaliding him for life and with his wrestling career in tatters. He died not long afterwards.

Other wrestlers of note were Willie Liebenberg, a big, handsome specimen of a wrestler with black, wavy hair, and I can still remember him fondly. According to my mother, who had known him personally during her schooldays in and around Johannesburg, he was a true gentleman, still from the chivalrous, 'Old School' tradition. Manie Maritz was a stocky but powerful wrestler

whose claim to fame was partly due to the exploits of his father, General Manie Maritz, during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902.

This General Manie Maritz reportedly was so strong that once, in an effort to bring down a block-house in which the British soldiers had taken refuge, he stood on the back of man and lobbed a heavy bomb, that had to be carried to him and lifted up to him by two strong men, the distance of about twenty yards (almost twenty metres) to the top of the roof of the block-house, wreaking havoc among its inhabitants in the process.

In his classic on the Anglo-Boer War, '*Commando',* Deneys Reitz refers to another incident where Maritz's commando was once ambushed inside a farmhouse by conniving combatants in sympathy with the British. Maritz reportedly picked up one from the enemy and killed him instantly by flinging him like a ragdoll against the wall opposite him in the room of the house.

During the 1950s, the (masked) wrestler Percy Hall became very famous as 'Mr. X', and Jan Wilkens, a 6'5" (195.4 cm) giant, went on to win many titles as well as world titles all over the globe. He was a prolific wrestler, and very popular during his heyday. He used to buy his shirts from us at my father's general dealer shop in Carletonville during the early 1960s, and that's how I learned that he (at the time) wore a 19" (48,3 cm) collar.

It was also during the middle sixties that John van Reenen (198 cm/6'6"), now deceased, became known as a renowned young shot-putter and discus-thrower. He later followed up with a scholarship in the USA, but apparently has settled down lately in Stellenbosch, South Africa, as an artist (visual arts) in his own right; he has since died.

So, pound-for-pound and kilogram-for-kilogram: Who will win in a dogfight between a boxer and a wrestler, if such a match indeed could be arranged on 'equal' terms? I suppose it would depend on such variables as the participants' ages, weight (mass), height, strength, fitness, speed, health, digestion, mood, motivation, experience and that mysterious ingredient: 'Equilibrium' (or would it be the size of the bribe for the 'fix'?).

Nobody can really answer such a question with any certainty ... it would probably be tantamount to comparing apples with pears. I have, however, one story that may help the reader draw some credible semblance of a conclusion.

When I was in high school in 1962 in the Orange Free State (bear in mind that I changed schools all over South Africa at least eight times during my school career) there were, among others, these two guys called 'Eric' and 'Nally' (aliases). Now Eric was in my class in Grade 10 (in those days: Standard 8), and he was a particularly insufferable type of individual who was always spoiling for a fight and going around, not only challenging other boys to a dual, but also, in some cases, trying to bully other boys into submission, probably to show off his latest wrestling routines, as he, really a nice guy but overreaching himself a little bit, apparently was a strong, up-and-coming young wrestler.

I was, for instance, present one day when another boy in our class, 'Fires', not a wrestler or boxer of any kind, but taller than Eric and tough, and a little disadvantaged by a clubfoot, had to pull Eric off the back of another defenceless boy prostrate on the ground in order to rescue that boy from being mauled and possibly, injured by the stronger, clearly much more robust athlete of an accomplished (albeit amateur) wrestler. This heroic deed earned 'Fires' some well-earned dividends, because from the next day on he was regularly seen in the presence of the prettiest girl in the class. I have never met such a popular clubfoot in my life, which just goes to show you!

The other boy in this drama was Nally, a tall, skinny guy in Grade 11 (then Standard 9) who was a quiet, modest and rather unassuming person, and also an amateur boxer. What happened was, was that this Nally apparently was growing sick and tired of this Eric fellow, firstly because of his bullying tactics all over the school-grounds and, secondly, because he had been throwing down the gauntlet to Nally for some time now and, after all, a man has his pride.

It was one sunny afternoon, after school, that we all converged on the spot where the epic battle between wrestler and boxer was going to take place. There were about three dozen or so people,

pupils from the school. The rumour of the sparring contest had, without the benefit of 'social media', mind you, spread like wildfire, with the accompanying propaganda from the two opposing camps varying wildly.

"Eric has challenged Nally to a dual, and Nally has accepted!" (From the Eric camp).

"Nally has challenged Eric to a dual and is going to sort out Eric this afternoon after school once and for all!" (From the Nally camp).

I don't know whether camp-membership was official or casual, but my friend JohanS. and I immediately became Nally-supporters without any argument at all. It was a no-brainer ... Eric had to be stopped, for he was fast becoming the school's undisputed and unopposed (but never democratically elected) super-brat.

Apparently, Nally was not contemplating any specific grand stratagem of note ... he was going to wait for the original aggressor and most audible belligerent, Eric, to make the first hostile move. In the meantime, all our information on the dual came from the single most reliable and time-tested source on earth ... the grapevine. Also, the parties had to apply the methods in dispute i.e., boxing (Nally) and wrestling (Eric). There was to be no referee.

From what later transpired Eric must have had an idea, from the start, to pulverize Nally into submission with a quick succession of only two deft 'wrestler's' moves .... it was 'scorched earth'; he wanted this thing over and done with as soon as possible. The kids were anyway getting fidgety, as some (myself included) had already missed their school-bus home in favour of the excitement of the dual between the titans.

"Come on, Nally ... show him!" (From the Nally-camp).

"Come on, Eric ... what are you waiting for?" (From the Eric camp).

From what I now in hindsight can deduce, Eric's stratagem apparently was to storm at Nally from the general direction of his 'corner' where he was being 'embayed' by his many vocal supporters, ram Nally with his head in a mighty jolt to the stomach (an old but not necessarily 'ethical' trick among the wrestling fraternity) and, as Nally doubled over from the impact, strike Nally on the nose by bringing his head up at the same time, thus connecting with Nally's face with the back of his head in one mighty *coup de grâce* of a wallop ... the same stratagem later employed by Jim Brown in the film, *'The Dirty Dozen'*.

When I saw Nally vacillate (he was not looking very enthusiastic about the bout), I was beginning to get worried. What if Nally chickened out? Why didn't he lead the attack; was he too scared? In fact, they both were beginning to look increasingly anxious, and I was sure that they were, at that juncture, beginning to develop that classic 'buyer's remorse' of regrets over their idiotic resolve to go ahead with the silly tournament, you know ... that *"What on earth were we thinking?"* type of feeling.

It was then that Eric, a blonde-haired, square-shouldered, robust specimen of an athlete, unexpectedly and suddenly broke loose like a recalcitrant young calf that had seen a hole in the fence and came down those two or three metres that were separating him from Nally like a runaway bull in a rodeo ring. The charge with which he, bent slightly forward at an angle and with his head down, dashed across to where Nally was standing and rammed into Nally, was so astonishing that it took us all by surprise ... man!

Greater was the surprise, however, with which Nally had after all, despite all the statistical odds against him (if all the propaganda from the crowd of Eric-supporters could be believed), kept his cool and countered Eric lethal onslaught and rose to the occasion. Yes, Eric had rammed his

head into Nally with considerable speed and force, but for once in his illustrious amateur wrestling career, his speed and force had worked against him.

When his head came up (as planned, mind you) Nally's right fist, aiming at the chin, came from seemingly nowhere, powerfully connecting with Eric exactly at the point where the momentum of the charge had exponentially increased the velocity and force of the blow with which Nally's leather-gloved fist collided with Eric's big blabber mouth. Weeks after the bout the kids were still reminiscing: Yes, Nally's timing was simply superb; only one blow and it was 'game over'.

Eric's knees buckled underneath him, and he had to be helped up and steadied by his now motley little remnant of disillusioned supporters. He looked shocked and flustered and with his lip bleeding profusely. From all directions the kids were now beginning to disperse, some disheartened, some depressed and some elated. Nally turned, shrugged his shoulders, and started walking home ... it was getting late. Somewhere a lone little heron of a 'kiewiet' (heron) chirped. The tournament was over; all that was left was for me to walk the three kilometres to our home after a first round that had barely lasted sixty seconds.

References

1. AfricanRingMagazine.com. *Ewart Potgieter: SA Giant.* Online 2022.
2. AfricanRingMagazine.com. *Ring Magazine (Africa).* Online 2022.
3. Artefacts.co.za. *ZAR Bridge over Hennops River (Wierda).* Online 2022.
4. Boxrec.com. *Bennie Knoetze.* Online 2022.
5. Britannica.com. *Abraham Lincoln.* Online 2022.
6. Britannica.com. *Noël Coward.* Online 2022.
7. Britannica.com. *Science Fiction.* Online 2022.
8. Britannica.com. *Transhumanism.* Online 2022.
9. Comrades.com. *Comrades Marathon: The Ultimate Human Race.* Online 2022.
10. MyHeritage.com. *ManieMaritz (Wrestler).* Online 2022.
11. Penguin Books. *Commando (Book).* Online 2022.
12. Shutterstock.com. *Kiewiet Bird Images.* Online.
13. Stacker.com. *100 Best Westerns of All Time.* Online 2022.
14. USNationalParkService. *Alcatraz Island.* Online 2022.
15. Wikipedia. *1936 Summer (Berlin) Olympics.* Online 2022.
16. Wikipedia. *Blockhouse.* Online 2022.
17. Wikipedia. *Brian Mitchell.* Online 2022.
18. Wikipedia. *Bruce Fordyce.* Online 2022.
19. Wikipedia. *Corrie Sanders.* Online 2022.
20. Wikipedia. *Coup de Grâce.* Online 2022.
21. Wikipedia. *D.F. Malan.* Online 2022.
22. Wikipedia. *Deneys Reitz.* Online 2022.
23. Wikipedia. *Edward (Judge) Jefferys.* Online 2022.
24. Wikipedia. *Francois Botha.* Online 2022.
25. Wikipedia. *Jacob ('Baby Jake') Matlala.* Online 2022.
26. Wikipedia. *James Bond.* Online 2022.
27. Wikipedia. *Jan Barnard (Athlete).* Online 2022.
28. Wikipedia. *Jan Wilkens.* Online 2022.
29. Wikipedia. *Johannes van der Walt.* Online 2022.
30. Wikipedia. *John van Reenen (Athlete).* Online 2022.
31. Wikipedia. *Johnny du Plooy.* Online 2022.
32. Wikipedia. *Judo.* Online 2022.
33. Wikipedia. *Jujutsu/Ju-Jitsu.* Online 2022.
34. Wikipedia. *Kallie Knoetze.* Online 2022.
35. Wikipedia. *Manie Maritz (Boer General).* Online 2022.
36. Wikipedia. *Martial Arts. Online 2022.*
37. Wikipedia. *Mike Holt.* Online 2022.
38. Wikipedia. *Mike Schutte.* Online 2022.
39. Wikipedia. *Mike Weaver.* Online 2022.

40. Wikipedia. *National Party.* Online 2022.
41. Wikipedia. *Nazism.* Online 2022.
42. Wikipedia. *Orange Free State.* Online 2022.
43. Wikipedia. *Ossewa Brandwag.* Online 2022.
44. Wikipedia. *Paul Nash (Athlete).* Online 2022.
45. Wikipedia. *Pierre Coetzer.* Online 2022.
46. Wikipedia. *Robey Leibbrandt.* Online 2022.
47. Wikipedia. *Star Wars.* Online 2022.
48. Wikipedia. *Stellenbosch.* Online 2022.
49. Wikipedia. *Vic Toweel.* Online 2022.
50. Wikipedia. *Wally Hayward.* Online 2022.
51. Wikipedia. *Western Genre.* Online 2022.
52. Wikipedia. *William Herndon (Lawyer).* Online 2022.
53. Wikipedia. *Willie Liebenberg: SA Heavyweight Championship:1950.* Online 2022.
54. WrestlingHeritage.co.uk. *Willem 'Percy' Hall.* Online 2022.

12

Tragedy at Wingfield

To survive it is often necessary to fight, and to fight you have to dirty yourself.
[George Orwell, 1903-1950].

In 1971 I travelled to the Wingfield Air Force base in Cape Town to celebrate ten years of political independence as organised by the South African Defence Force and to, just like in 1966 in Pretoria, again show off the young Republic's military prowess, hardware and technology. It was a mandatory call-up, thus not optional. Bear in mind that, although all of us brothers were eventually conscripted into the army, only my brother CorrieS. ever served time in an actual war, i.e., the war in Angola between South Africa and SWAPO's forces in the region His task, for three months, was to drive refugees on the backs of open, roofless trucks from Angola over the border into Namibia, a traumatic experience for the refugees and a lifechanging experience for my brother.

This was not my first Parade, for, as already hinted, as a young 18-year old conscript I was also present during the 1966 parade past the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria, the memorial erected in 1938 in honour of the Afrikaner pioneers that had led the Cape 'Dutch', disillusioned with 19th century British rule, into the hinterland of Southern Africa up North in 1838 under such legendary leaders as Gerrit Maritz, Hendrik Potgieter, Louis Trichardt, Sarel Cilliers, Piet Retief, Andries Pretorius and others.

The 1966 parade was an enormous affair. By 30 May 1966 over 17 000 soldiers had eventually converged on Pretoria where they were housed in 5 000 tents spread out over a large tract of land just outside Voortrekkerhoogte, formerly 'Robert's Heights' (in honour of Lord Fred Roberts) indefatigable British commander of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902.

Being part of the military police contingent with the duty to maintain law and order in the large camp, we drove out every morning for two months to the Leeuwkop Prison at Halfway House where we picked up a large group of convicts in our green Bedford army truck and brought them back to Pretoria to assist us with the mammoth task of the erection of the thousands of tents for the anticipated avalanche of soldiers to come. The date set for the parade was 31 May 1966.

At 12 pm on 30 May 1966 we 'conscripts', barely out of school and still wet behind the ears, were dropped off at the Voortrekker Monument where the route for the parade had been marked out. All through the evening and through the night of the 30th until 11 am on the 31st, we were engaged with point-duty in the traffic, with cars streaming in non-stop without abating for twenty-three hours, after which the Parade began to get into motion.

Against the backdrop of thousands of civilian and military audiences and the blare of music in the typically WW2 Nazi (marching) tradition, there was a laborious march-past of 17 000 soldiers, which included, over and above the infantry soldiers etc., military hardware like armoured cars, troop-carriers, anti-landmine vehicles, missile-launchers etc. ad nauseum plus the usual fly-past by supersonic jet fighters and helicopters, so reminiscent of the Nazi-parades of WW2, complete with its rousing German-type music and marches etc.

Bear in mind that, during WW2, South Africans had fought bravely alongside English, American, Australian, Canadian, Nieu-Zealander, Indian and some other Commonwealth countries against the axis powers of Germany, Italy and Japan in such North African theatres of war such as *Sidi Resegh*, *Mersa Matruh*, *El Guma*, *Halfaya Pass* (later dubbed 'Hellfire Pass'), *Tobruk* and *El Alamein* etc. For the duration of WW2, Russia also fought on the side of the Allies, which did not sit well with anti-communists in the Allies at all.

Who was it, however, who had said: *"One must know how and when to choose one's battles!"* (?). By taking in Russia as a partner against Nazis did not necessarily mean that Britain & Co was condoning communism *per se*. Be that as it may, it nevertheless so transpired that the *Battle of Stalingrad* is anyway considered today as the anvil upon which the back of the Nazi war-machine was first broken. For instance, upon the demise of Nazi-Germany, Hugh Trevor-Roper, in his book, *The Last Days of Hitler*, wrote:

> *"Now the god himself had perished; the temple had been utterly destroyed; the faithful had been scattered or converted; and the suicide of the exiled priest is the natural end of a chapter in history: the history, it seems, of a savage tribe and a primitive superstition."*
>
> [Trevor-Roper: 230].

When the Nazi top-brass (and others in the USA and in Britain on their behalf) during the Nuremberg-trials tried to deny their moral guilt and exonerate themselves on the grounds that there never had been any formal laws in existence against the atrocities they were supposed to have committed, they were anyway indicted and judged on the grounds of a 'higher moral law', summed up by William L. Shirer in his book *The Nightmare Years: 1930-1940* as follows:

> *"On those other charges, though, war crimes and crimes against humanity – especially those of the massacre of the Jews and the Poles and the Russians – I felt grateful that they have been brought. To those legal hair-splitters at home and in Britain who argued that you couldn't try men for acts that were not specifically crimes on the statute books when they were committed – however horrible they might have been – there was, I thought, a sufficient answer. Massacre, murder, torture, even enslavement, had long been recognized by all civilizations as crimes and embodied in their laws.*
>
> *As Justice Jackson argued: 'We propose to punish acts which have been regarded as criminal since the time of Cain and have been so written in every civilized code.'"*
>
> [Shirer: 653].

Incidentally, the South African fighter-pilot, Sailor Malan, squadron-leader of 74 Squadron RAF, was considered the top-scoring ace of the war during the Battle of Britain in 1940. Nevertheless, at the end of our parade in 1966 in Pretoria, we, at 11 O' Clock on the day of the parade and just after the parade, on the instruction of our coordinators we jumped into jeeps all over the place and abruptly departed for camp, leaving the thousands of parked cars high-and-dry to fend for themselves, without lifting a finger to help them out on their way again after it had taken 23 hours to get them inside and parked. We ordinary 'conscripts' could, however, do nothing about it, and I thought: What a dastardly thing to do, but orders were orders.

Before we left, however, an announcement came over the public address system to the effect that the chief organiser of the parade, i.e., the brave brigadier who had organised and led the parade from the very front and had taken the prime minister's salute, had suddenly died from a heart attack ... the challenge of organising, overseeing and pulling off a successful parade of such monstrous dimensions had been too much. Imagine then the logistical stresses on and challenges facing armies in times of war ... no wonder Hitler eventually folded before the onslaught of the cumulative power of the Allies. Not long afterwards it was also reported in the news that the prime minister had been shot and seriously wounded by a political fanatic.

Back in Cape Town, at the Wingfield Air Force Base toward the end of May 1971, we one day had to embark on our last 'parade dress-rehearsal' before the day of the parade itself ... an actual march-by of the thousands of soldiers designated for the parade, just as the case was at Voortrekkerhoogte in Pretoria at the time in 1966 had been. Although the parade proper on 31 May was going to take place in the Cape Town CBD, our dress-rehearsal was arranged to take

place at the Air Force base of Wingfield, as it apparently had enough paved roads and scope to simulate the parade for this purpose.

At the parade proper, the prime minister was going to, as usual, take the salute from the march-by, but for the purpose of the dress-rehearsal that day the minister of defence had been designated to inspect the parade for possible glitches and take the salute on behalf of the prime minister.

Now, bear in mind that before the dress-rehearsal we had been briefed very thoroughly by our instructors and mentors on the rules and protocols for the parade. One specific rule that I had taken very seriously to heart was that we were under no circumstances to allow any civilian vehicles through to intersect or transect the Parade at any point for whatever reason whatsoever, i.e., *'... when the Parade was in motion'*. In fact, the phrase, *'When the Parade was in motion',* rang over and over as stridently and clearly as the bells of Notre Dame in my mind.

Well, the parade (dress rehearsal) was just nicely in motion with all those thousands of marching troops and military hardware en route to the stadium, probably circling the cramped perimeter over and over no doubt, to where the defence minister was waiting, when an assortment of civilian vehicles, i.e., commercial delivery trucks, travelling salespeople, representatives from other service suppliers etc. began arriving at the main entrance to the camp where the parade was in motion. So, there I stood at the main gate with the power of Thor, mythological Norse god, in my hands: No one was allowed to enter that gate but, on my word, *while the parade was in motion.*

Suddenly a booming voice rang out over the widely dispersed intercom-system: *"Parade! Parade ... Halt!"* The following moment that entire mammoth of a parade-body came to an abrupt halt. Then another one: *"Parade! Parade ... At Rest!"* (Parade at rest).

I turned, smiled at the drivers in the civilian vehicles and motioned to them to drive through ... after all, the parade had come to a halt, and no parade of any kind was in motion now. However, all those civilian vehicles were all just about thoroughly and irretrievably in when the voice suddenly exploded again:

"*Parade! Parade ... Attention!"*

"Parade! Parade ... March!"

And there they went, with all those civilian vehicles merging embarrassingly, inexorably sandwiched into the parade proper. Five minutes later an irate navy officer with all kinds of scrambled- eggs insignia on his sleeves and scary motifs on his jacket stopped next to me with tyres screeching and smoke billowing from his nose:

Naval Officer: *"What were you thinking? I thought I told you not to allow civilian vehicles into the parade when the parade was in motion?!"*

I: *"But I thought you said ... sir, well, er ... that parade certainly was not in motion at the time I allowed the civilian vehicles in!?"* I protested.

Navy Officer: *"What I meant was that once this Parade has been configured and ready to march, whether it was standing still or moving, it is to be considered in motion, you clot! By the way, why did you not salute me when I arrived? Can't you see I am an officer from the navy? Who is your officer commanding? When you retire from shift, go and place yourself on orders (for insubordination) with your officer commanding!"*

I: *"Yes sir! I'm sorry sir!"* I replied as I cowered lower and lower down into the concrete of the road-surface from embarrassment. As an army dude I seriously did not know that he was an officer. Imagine the scenario with the minister of defence saluting the civilian delivery trucks and vans and all kinds of civilian contractors where they were scheduled to pass by him for the salute.

I never, however, went to put myself on orders with my officer commanding, as I was adamant that the parade was not 'in motion' when at that critical juncture I had allowed the civilian vehicles in. Soon after, while I was still vacillating whether I should go or not, a tragedy of much greater magnitude suddenly transpired, eclipsing my little error and problem into virtual oblivion.

On 26 May 1971, as we were unwinding in our tents after lunch or something, voices suddenly rang out among the tents in our section:

"Volunteers! We need volunteers for emergency city-duty!" All volunteers for city-duty, please report at the parade ground now!"

It so transpired that they were looking for volunteers to go and assist with the clean-up of some military-related accident involving Devil's Peak (in the Table Mountain Game Reserve) in Cape Town. After the nature of the accident (as well as what out duties were to entail) was explained to us, I declined and went back to my tent. This was the accident:

> *"On 26 May 1971, three South African Air Force Hawker Siddelley HS125 (Code named Mercurius) aircraft crashed into Devil's Peak, killing all 11 on board. The aircraft were flying in close formation, practicing for a fly past during the upcoming 10th anniversary Republic Day celebrations on 31 May. A low cloud base was cited as a contributory factor. The impact was heard throughout the surrounding suburbs and scars in the ground can still be seen today."*
>
> [Wikipedia].

The 1971 parade was my last ... I don't want to ever attend another military parade again, as I carry only unpleasant memories of military parades:

(i) After the 1966 parade in Pretoria the organiser, Brigadier Burger, died from a heart attack and the prime minister was shot and wounded by a political fanatic (he was later finally stabbed to death by a mentally deranged government-employee in the Houses of Parliament in Cape Town not long after the shooting incident)

(ii) I was insulted and embarrassed by a senior naval officer during our parade dress-rehearsal at Wingfield (probably all of it my own fault) and

(iii) we have had to receive the news of eleven airmen killed in an accident involving three fighter-jets that had flown and crashed into Devil's Peak during a practice fly-past.

The only memory and image of the 1971 Cape Town Parade which I now savour with some relish is of the defence minister saluting the parade ... as well as saluting the surprised drivers of the large Coca Cola® and Simba Chips® delivery trucks.

References

1. Britannica.com. *Nazi Party Rallies.* Online 2022.
2. Capetownetc.com. *What was the Devil's Peak Tragedy?* Online 2022.

3. EyewitnessNews.co.za. *Leeuwkop Prison.* Online 2022.
4. Press.uchicago.edu>books>book>Chicago. *The Last Days of Hitler (Book).* Online.
5. ResearhGate.net. *Sidi Resegh & Tobruk:*
6. SAHistory.org.za. *Voortrekker Monument.* Online 2022.
Two South African military disasters revisited 1941-1942. Online 2022.
7. Wikipedia. *A.G. (Sailor) Malan.* Online 2022.
8. Wikipedia. *Andries Pretorius.* Voortrekker Leader. Online 2022.
9. Wikipedia. *Battle of Mersa Matruh.* Online 2022.
10. Wikipedia. *Cape Dutch/Cape Afrikaners.* Online 2022.
11. Wikipedia. *Devil's Peak (Cape Town).* Online 2022.
12. Wikipedia. *Frederick H.S. Roberts, VC.* Online 2022.
13. Wikipedia. *George Orwell.* Online 2022.
14. Wikipedia. *Gerrit Maritz.* Voortrekker Leader. Online 2022.
15. Wikipedia. *Halfaya Pass.* Online 2022.
16. Wikipedia. *Hendrik Potgieter.* Voortrekker Leader. Online 2022.
17. Wikipedia. *Hugh Trevor-Roper.* Online 2022.
18. Wikipedia. *J.J. (Lang Hans) van Rensburg.* Voortrekker Leader. Online 2022.
19. Wikipedia. *Louis Trichardt.* Voortrekker Leader. Online 2022.
20. Wikipedia. *Nuremberg Trials.* Online 2022.
21. Wikipedia. *Piet Retief.* Voortrekker Leader. Online 2022.
22. Wikipedia. *Sarel Cilliers.* Voortrekker Leader. Online 2022.
23. Wikipedia. *SAS Wingfield.* Online 2022.
24. Wikipedia. *Second Battle of El Alamein.* Online 2022.
25. Wikipedia. *Second Boer War.* Online 2022.
26. Wikipedia. *Siege of Tobruk.* Online 2022.
27. Wikipedia. *South African Defence Force.* Online 2022.
28. Wikipedia. *The Nightmare Years 1930-1940 (Book).* Online 2022.
29. Wikipedia. *Thor.* Online 2022.
30. Wikipedia. *William L. Shirer.* Online 2022.

13

Army Blues

National Service did the country a lot of good ... but it damned near killed the Army.
[General Sir Richard Hull, b.1907].

I was called up for my so-called nine months of mandatory conscription and national service for the 'apartheid government' in 1966. I was 18 years old, after just having finished school, so, on the 4th of January, at the ungodly hour of 4am (today 56 years ago) I entrained at the Oberholzer Railway Station in Carletonville and only detrained four hours later (at about 8am) at the Pretoria Station in Pretoria, South Africa's capital city.

The Pretoria Railway Station, a stone's throw from the Victoria Hotel where, among others, Sir Rider Haggard (during his heyday) used to stay over, is a historic station. Here the feet of such eminent men as President Paul Kruger, General (Field-Marshall) Jan Smuts, General Louis Botha, General Koos de La Rey, General Christiaan de Wet, Lord Horatio Kitchener, Lord Fred Roberts and Sir Winston Churchill had trod during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902.

Here prominent spiritual leaders like the legendary John G. Lake, Mahatma Gandhi and David Du Plessis (affectionately known as 'Mr. Pentecost') had once walked. Here famous writers like Rudyard Kipling, Mark Twain, John Buchan, Arthur Conan Doyle and Rider Haggard (who reportedly got his inspiration for the novel 'She' from (who must be obeyed!) the Sterkfontein Caves nearby) had probably at one time or another stepped out of their carriage into the warm South African sunlight, Pretoria-style. Arthur Conan Doyle, inventor of Sherlock Holmes, went even a step further and upon the conquest of Pretoria had gone into the 'Raadsaal' (Government House) to sit in President Paul Kruger's imposing chair, just for the heck of it.

Across the street from the station, one can still today glimpse the classical façade of the Victoria Hotel where Sir Rider Haggard once loved to spend his first nights in Africa, and from where he emerged to write his famous adventure stories more than a hundred years ago.

I drive past the Sterkfontein and other caves, the actual caves that had inspired the book 'She', every time we go to visit my family in Vanderbijlpark, or friends in Krugersdorp, the oldest town in my province. Even the eight-foot tall 'pulpit', mentioned in his book, can still be observed intact in one of those caves.

Today, of course, the South African government and WITS University are selling the site to the gullible public as the so-called 'cradle of humankind', a misnomer if ever there was one. What used to be a culturally sacred site of immense historical and archaeological significance, has now been transformed into a Disney-type, revenue-spinning theme-park used to bolster the religious-cult of 'Evolution' with. My suggested name for the latest 'fossil-find' at that theme-park (today marketed as 'Maropeng') has, at the time of writing, not yet been accepted, i.e., *Ridiculipithecus conjecturalensis*.

The 'Cradle of Humankind' at Maropeng in South Africa has degenerated into a commercialised site where black and white people alike today come to worship at the feet of a 19th century white colonial called 'Darwin' and, metaphorically speaking, their hominid ancestral spirits.

Not far from the Victoria Hotel, say about twenty minutes' walk, one can still spot the State Model School where Sir Winston Churchill was briefly incarcerated during the Anglo-Boer War before his celebrated escape to the steps of the Durban City Hall in Natal (today Kwazulu-Natal).

Not far from the State Model School stands the proud bronze statue of President Paul Kruger facing the historic Palace of Justice where Nelson Mandela was convicted of high treason in the 1960s. The President (i.e., the statue of Paul Kruger) is still being guarded faithfully by four

armed Boers, also still bravely brandishing loaded bandolier and deadly Mauser. These four bronzed Boers apparently were taken to Italy after the war where Lord Horatio Kitchener, an avid collector of art and memorabilia, also reportedly had endeavoured to acquire them for his private collection, but they were later returned to South Africa to their final and rightful resting place on the Pretoria 'Plein' (Square).

Behind the President stands the huge historic Raadsaal, the building from where the ZAR government had once ruled with an iron fist, before the imposing Union Buildings (and where the world-famous *Three Tenors* not long ago had given a most memorable concert) were inaugurated about a decade later. It was in this self-same Raadsaal where Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes and volunteer (without pay) for the Langman Hospital in Bloemfontein during the Anglo-Boer War, eventually came to sit in the chair of the then deposed President, with the hoisted British flag fluttering in the wind and 'Khakis' (Tommies) marching in closed-order outside.

About a 1-wood; plus a 3-wood, a 2-iron, a 4-wood and a pitching-wedge (well, more or less) a little south-east from Paul Kruger's statue, one can still visit the typically 'Victorian to Edwardian' style mansion of Melrose House, (opposite Burgers Park) where the Treaty of Vereeniging was signed between the British and the Boers in 1902.

Now, if the reader would care to remember, I earlier had said 'so-called' because the (so-called) 'nine months' mandatory military training in the Military Police eventually were to stretch into six extra 'refresher training' camps (some 12 days and others 26 days, at a time) plus an extra stint of a few years of annual 'commando duty' in the South African Commandoes branch, whose task it was to safeguard house-and-hearth with a special focus on border-patrols, networking with our country's farming community in sensitive areas (like e.g., the borders with Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Namibia) via the Marnet radio-communication system and executing all kinds of general house-and-hearth type of patrols at local Commando HQ's, not unlike the British 'Home Guard' during WW2.

In the Military Police I, apparently, was perpetuating a proud tradition ... both an uncle, Johan Z., as well as my grandfather on my mother's side, GullusG. Snr., had served in the Military Police during WW2. So, on that memorable day of 4 January 1966, I picked up my suitcase and trampled, like a sheep to an abattoir, to the rows of olive-green Bedford trucks that adorned the Pretoria railway station's driveway outside. In the end, the prescribed nine months of National Duty, in terms of the government's policy on National Conscription, eventually gave birth to years and years of intermittent army-duty away from home.

I am not going to bore the reader with the detail of the first day in the army ... suffice it to say that all my civilian clothes were stolen (probably by cleaners or sanitation workers) with our first inspection the next day as we have had to hide our suitcases containing our civilian outfits from the lieutenant-on-inspection in the 'ablution blocks' adjacent to the barracks.

I was in Barracks Nr. 1527 at the Services School in Voortrekkerhoogte (today Thaba Tshwane) which, in earlier times, used to be called 'Robert's Heights' after Lord Fred Roberts, Commander-in-Chief of the British during the Anglo-Boer War. Those barracks probably all predated WW2 and are still standing as I write.

The first important skill to learn in those days was to learn how to phone home once you're inside and once you're a 'soldier'. No matter how many phone booths there were, there were never enough. One used to spend hours waiting for a vacant phone, and then the battle to get a switchboard operator (to 'put one through') would begin. By the early hours of the morning there would still be people waiting on pre-arranged 'reverse' phone-calls to arrive. Waiting in line at public telephones in those days was almost like waiting in lines at automatic teller machines these days to withdraw cash; why do the people in front of you always take so long to finish their business ... are they 'Skyping' friends in 'Puruguay' or what?

Nevertheless, a relative of mine, my mother's kid brother, FrikkieG., now already deceased and who used to be younger than I, was conscripted long after I had completed my initial stint in the army, once related the following interesting incident to me.

FrikkieG. was called up to serve in the prestigious 'State President's Guard', almost (but not quite) on par with the Queen's Guard at Buckingham Palace ... a very elegant and swanky outfit during the 1960s created to impress the public during solemn ceremonies involving the State President. I still remember the decorative green uniforms embroidered with gold here and there ... a considerable boost for any young conscript's otherwise faltering ego. The positions of the State President of those days and its Prime Minister, however, have in the meantime been merged into the one single position of the President today.

One evening, over a weekend, FrikkieG. decided to march over to the telephone-booth at the end of the road in their camp, not far from the entrance to the camp, to make a phone-call to a person he had met earlier that week, presumably a new girlfriend. He had just finished guard-duty and wanted to try and phone this person before he went to bed.

So, he marched right up to the phone-booth and commenced to proceed with the protocols required to make a successful phone-call. Bear in mind that it was long before the advent of mobile-phones, cellphones, Skype-call, texting, e-mail etc. Communication was still very primitive, and the social media of today virtually non-existent. The closest we had come to social media at the time must have been 'amateur-radio' (Afrikaans: 'Burger Band Radio') that many young guys in those days had installed in their cars.

Making a phone call in the army, especially from a public phone-booth, can sometimes prove an irksome experience, and this evening was no exception to the rule. Visibility was low and formal lighting virtually non-existent. Be that as it may, FrikkieG. stepped into the phone booth and, in the faint moonlight, proceeded with selecting the relevant directory for the area in which he suspected this young damsel to be living; all he had had in his possession was a name and an address.

As the covers to the directories had long ago succumbed to the ravages of time, decay and the inexorable, invisible forces of the 'Second Law of Thermodynamics', he first had rummage through all the directories, chained to the wall, to try and ascertain the correct one to employ. This he had to do by scanning the pages for the areas involved ... quite a challenge in the dim moonlight inside the phone-booth.

Eventually, and at last, he found what looked like the correct area-directory to use (wow man!). He then proceeded to rummage through the pages for the surname and address in his possession as scribbled in the palm of his hand as his only available cue, only to discover that that page had been conveniently torn out by a previous selfish caller who probably needed to go and study its contents in the light of a lamp in the tent.

He then apparently decided to phone the telephone company (the 'Operator' at the 'Exchange') and ask them for the telephone number ... perhaps they would be able to help. However, letting go of the directory to grope for the telephone receiver in the dark, he to his dismay discovered that there was no receiver; it was missing, still sporting the remnant of a thread dangling malevolently from the unit, where the receiver once, in the good old days, used to be. He stepped out of the booth, dejected and glum.

"*Ah ... forget it!*"

He withdrew his rifle, which he had stuck into the ground outside the booth bayonet first, from the ground, slung it over his shoulder and marched back to his tent. When he arrived in the tent, he placed his rifle on the ground next to his army bunk, lit a kerosene (paraffin) lamp and proceeded to undress for bed.

The next morning, while sitting up and contemplating the cruel unfairness of fate, he saw, with a jolt, what had happened to the rifle. It stood next to his bed, upright, its bayonet reaching for the sky, and impaled upon the bayonet, a whopping, gory, blood-spattered (very dead) frog.

References.

1. Artefacts.co.za. *Palace of Justice/Pretoria.* Online 2022.
2. Britannica.com. *Horatio Herbert Kitchener.* Online 2022.
3. Britannica.com. *Mauser Rifle.* Online 2022.
4. GreatWarForum.org. *Robert's Heights Pretoria 1910.* Online 2022.
5. SAHistory.co.za. *Raadsaal Building, Church Square, Pretoria.* Online 2022.
6. SAMilHistory.com. *Voortrekkerhoogte.* Online 2022.
7. ScienceDirect.com. *Second Law of Thermodynamics.* Online 2022.
8. Tripadvisor.co.za. *Durban City Hall.* Online 2022.
9. Tripadvisor.co.za. *The Victoria Hotel, Pretoria.* Online 2022.
10. Wikipedia. *Arthur Conan Doyle.* Online 2022.
11. Wikipedia. *Buckingham Palace.* Online 2022.
12. Wikipedia. *Burgers Park.* Online 2022.
13. Wikipedia. *Christiaan de Wet.* Online 2022.
14. Wikipedia. *Cradle of Humankind.* Online 2022.
15. Wikipedia. *David ('Mr. Pentecost') du Plessis.* Online 2022.
16. Wikipedia. *End Conscription Campaign.* Online 2022.
17. Wikipedia. *Frederick (1st Earl) Roberts.* Online 2022.
18. Wikipedia. *H. Rider Haggard.* Online 2022.
19. Wikipedia. *Jan Smuts.* Online 2022.
20. Wikipedia. *John Buchan.* Online 2022.
21. Wikipedia. *John G. Lake.* Online 2022.
22. Wikipedia. *Koos de la Rey.* Online 2022.
23. Wikipedia. *Krugersdorp.* Online 2022.
24. Wikipedia. *Louis Botha.* Online 2022.
25. Wikipedia. *Mahatma Gandhi.* Online 2022.
26. Wikipedia. *Mark Twain.* Online 2022.
27. Wikipedia. *Oberholzer.* Online 2022.
28. Wikipedia. *Paul Kruger.* Online 2022.
29. Wikipedia. *Pretoria Railway Station.* Online 2022.
30. Wikipedia. *Queen's Guard.* Online 2022.
31. Wikipedia. *Richard Hull.* Online 2022.
32. Wikipedia. *Rudyard Kipling.* Online 2022.
33. Wikipedia. *Second Boer War (1899-1902).* Online 2022.
34. Wikipedia. *Sherlock Holmes.* Online 2022.
35. Wikipedia. *South African Republic (ZAR).* Online 2022.
36. Wikipedia. *Staats Model School.* Online 2022.
37. Wikipedia. *Sterkfontein.* Online 2022.
38. Wikipedia. *Union Buildings.* Online 2022.
39. Wikipedia. *University of Witwatersrand.* Online 2022.
40. Wikipedia. *Vanderbijlpark.* Online 2022.
41. Wikipedia. *Winston Churchill.* Online 2022.

14

Nothing Ever Happens Here

Adventure is the champagne of life.
[G.K. Chesterton, 1874-1936].

Carletonville, named after an earlier mining-engineer, Guy Carleton-Jones, is a bustling mining town where goldmines proliferate. We have lived there in 1950 when I was 3 years old going on 4, from 1958 to 1959 when I was 11 going on 12 and again from 1964 to 1971, when I was 16 going on 23.

This mining town used to offer modest entertainment from swimming-pools, tennis-courts and bowling-greens to a large, modern cinema that has, however, since been converted into a general dealer type hardware shop. In its heyday there also used to be two drive-in theatres and a large, thriving CBD comprising many shops and businesses of all kinds. At my last visit about three months ago I have noticed some new additions in the form of large shopping-malls and even an attractive, brand-new mosque erected by the Muslim community.

From 1964 until the middle seventies my father used to have several shops there, but the main attraction was our flagship-shop (a general-dealer) in the old CBD in Diamond Street going by the name of 'Diamond Street Shopping Centre'. How many fond memories do I not cherish from those days! We used to offer gents-wear, ladies-wear, dress-materials, dress-patterns, curtaining, shoes, haberdashery, and other odds and ends. This was also the shop where I was being groomed for 'business-stardom' as I already was a 'company-director' at 21 (on paper and for what it was worth).

When I was only 17, in 1964, my father had given me the opportunity to earn some pocket-money by working in the shop on Saturdays under the 'mentorship' of Suleman ('Solly') S., my father's gifted bookkeeper and manager. Solly was a Muslim and there were several other Muslims as well and some Hindus too, all working together in close harmony with the occasional altercation or two now and then.

There never were any serious conflicts between the two 'factions' that I now specifically can recall, although some minor altercations did erupt now and then during the Muslim 'Ramadan', or the Hindu 'Diwali'. The Muslims would, for instance, be fasting during the day (when they were only allowed to eat or smoke between sunset and sunrise) and then complain when the odour of food or the aroma of tobacco were detected from a corner in the shop where the Hindus were quartered.

A source of no small fascination (and amusement) was to observe some Muslims and Hindus (of course not all) exchanging 'Christmas' gifts among their own during Christmas. Although these 'nations' guard religiously over their respective faiths (obviously), they used to display some amazing goodwill toward me as well as toward all patrons in general, for in must be borne in mind that I (in fact none of us) had necessarily been a devout Christian at the time.

The Muslim and Hindu business-communities attach much value to relationships, both business and private, and, at Christmastime they would, for instance, arrive at our house with gifts of beautiful chinaware for my mother and other interesting novelties for the rest of the family, all obviously aimed as public-relations stunts, but great goodwill-gestures nevertheless as far as we were concerned.

I never learned to speak any of the languages, i.e., Gujarati (Muslim), or Tamil and Hindi (Hindu). It is much too complicated, almost like Sanskrit backwards; it all sounded Greek to me. Most if not all Indian businessmen and women in South Africa speak English by 'default'; it is a

given, just as is the case in India and Pakistan. In fact, there are people of the opinion that Britain had left no greater legacy to India than the English language and, of course, the sports of cricket ... or is it simply the fact that Britain 'had left'?

AngloGold Ashanti's Western Deep Levels goldmine, and its 'TauTona Mine' (Western Deep No.3 Shaft) in Carletonville is, at 3.9 km (2.4 mi), today of the deepest mining operations in the world. It has 800 km (500 mi) of tunnels with 5600 miners working there. During operations the temperature must be reduced from the usual 55°C down to a more tolerable 28°C, and rock-temperature averages 60°C. According to Wikipedia this mine was recently featured on National Geographic's 'MegaStructures' and it eclipses the 'East Rand Proprietary Mine Ltd' on the East Rand (in South Africa) by a depth of 0.4 km.

So, what do I make of it? Only that for a country sporting so much gold, platinum, diamonds and precious metals and other much sought-after minerals, we are still a very poor third-world type country, probably due to the superstitious culture of forefather-veneration and ancestral spirit worship among the indigenous tribes; political (managerial) incompetence in government on national, provincial as well as local levels and corruption in high places, whether government or the private sector (especially big business).

It is therefore no comfort that South Africa is the so-called 'economic powerhouse' of Africa ... had our country been run by a competent, professionalised government, we probably could by now have been up there with the USA, China, Japan, Germany, France, Australia and other first-world nations almost competing for first place in respect of GDP (Gross National Product).

Be that as it may, one day, in 1964, while my mother and I were sitting in the car in the parking-lot in front of our shop, I glumly remarked that nothing (of note) ever seemed to happen in Carletonville. The month of August is a dry month in South Africa with mournful sounding winds sometimes prevailing, which are inclined to create a dry and unattractive view of nature and a psychologically depressing, 'toxic' social climate in town, so reminiscent of the dreary winters sometimes shown in 'Tombstone' and 'Dodge City' in those cowboy-westerns I so loved to watch.

In those days Carletonville was a typical thriving little mining town with school, sport and the cinema as the main focus of the youth, but that was about it. I was only 17 years old and clamoured for city-life, and it galled me that we had to drive to Johannesburg all the time to see artists from overseas (e.g., Liberace, James Last, Victor Borge, Trini Lopez, Heathmore etc.) or shows of any significance in state-of-the art theatres.

Today, after having lived in small villages and cities all my life, however, and living in South Africa's capital city today, I have finally been completely healed of that infantile notion; in fact, my heart today yearns for the quietude and tranquillity of small-town life of 18th century Heimbach, Germany where my ancestors have hailed from. In 1964, however, I thought otherwise.

Not long after my morose remarks to my mother, I went to bed one evening when, at about 3am in the early hours of the morning, I was awakened by a prodigious 'explosion' followed by a fearsome volley of startling thunderclaps. My first reaction was one of, *"Goodness ... what on earth was that!?"* I nevertheless settled down, however, with the notion that it must have been the lightning and thunder with a new out-of-season promise of rain.

South Africa, especially where we lived, was known for its violent thunderstorms, and thunderstorms in the Drakensberg, for instance, have once even been described by an author as a string of firecrackers going off inside a biscuit-tin or cookie-jar. So, I relaxed and went back to sleep. The fact that no rain followed the 'thunder' did not immediately unsettle me a bit, although on the way to school the next morning I did remark to my father how weird it was that no rain had followed on the 'thunder' of the previous night.

When we arrived at school, the news had apparently already begun to filter through to those who had already arrived; the sound we had heard that previous night was the sound of an entire

house disappearing into a hole into the ground ... with people still inside it. The newspapers that morning carried the photograph of the tragedy: An entire block of houses (i.e., four houses) had been affected, but it was only the house of the Oosthuizen-family and the neighbouring house (apparently vacant at the time) that had been completely swallowed and devoured 'live'. The last thing some neighbours could remember was seeing Mr. Oosthuizen switching on the light in their bedroom, and then everything went dark:

> *"The area became notorious for its sinkholes and unstable ground conditions. This is as a result of a high proliferation of dolomite-rock formations which eroded with the lowering of the water table by extensive underground mining and its continuous pumping operations ... on 3 Augusts 1964 two houses and parts of two others disappeared down a massive sinkhole in which the Oosthuizen-family of four perished. No trace was ever found of them, their house or their car. A monument was erected on the hill overlooking the area where the Westdene suburb stood. The fitting inscription on the monument reads, 'God Himself laid them to rest.' An ancient sinkhole south-west of the village called the 'Hutgrot Cave' was the shelter of the Batswana tribes during the Mzilikazi raids."*
>
> [Wikipedia].

What a remarkable tombstone:

"God het hulle self ter aarde bestel." (Afrikaans for, "*God Himself has laid them to rest.").* The names of the five (not *four*) were: Johannes M. Oosthuizen (b.1927); Hester Oosthuizen (neé van der Watt); Jacoba M. (b.1951); Johannes D. (b.1956) and Marianne (b.1958).

Thereafter I never again dared to complain that nothing ever happened in Carletonville at all. To add further insult to injury, 'Gentleman Jim Reeves', my mother's favourite and still fondly cherished by my generation in South Africa, had died just three days before on 31 July 1964.

References

1. Britannica.com. *Christmas.* Online 2022.
2. Britannica.com. *G.K. Chesterton.* Online 2022.
3. Britannica.com. *Hindi Language.* Online 2022.
4. Britannica.com. *Mosque.* Online 2022.
5. Britannica.com. *Sanskrit Language.* Online 2022.
6. Discogs.com. *Heathmore.* Online 2022.
7. Investopedia.com. *Gross National Product (GNP).* Online 2022.
8. NationalGeographic.org. *Buddhism.* Online 2022.
9. NorthernMineResearchSociety.org.uk. *Guy Carleton-Jones.* Online 2022. M
10. SAHistory.org.za. *Oosthuizen Family disappears down a massive sinkhole in Carletonville.* Online 2022.
11. Wikipedia. *Diwali.* Online 2022.
12. Wikipedia. *Dodge City, Kansas.* Online 2022.
13. Wikipedia. *East Rand Mine.* Online 2022.
14. Wikipedia. *Gujarati Language.* Online 2022.
15. Wikipedia. *Guy Carleton-Jones.* Online 2022.
16. Wikipedia. *Hinduism.* Online 2022.
17. Wikipedia. *India.* Online 2022.
18. Wikipedia. *Indian People.* Online 2022.
19. Wikipedia. *James Last.* Online 2022.
20. Wikipedia. *Jim Reeves.* Online 2022.
21. Wikipedia. *Liberace.* Online 2022.
22. Wikipedia. *Mega Structure.* Online 2022.
23. Wikipedia. *Megastructures (TV series).* Online 2022.
24. Wikipedia. *Muslims.* Online 2022.
25. Wikipedia. *National Geographic.* Online 2022.
26. Wikipedia. *Ramadan.* Online 2022.
27. Wikipedia. *Tamil Language.* Online 2022.

28. Wikipedia. *TauTona Mine.* Online 2022.
29. Wikipedia. *Tombstone, Arizona.* Online 2022.
30. Wikipedia. *Trini Lopez.* Online.
31. Wikipedia. *Victor Borge.* Online 2022.

15

Mr. Jones' Trouble with the Army

When someone raises the palms of his hands together, we do not know whether it is to bury himself in prayer or to throw himself into the sea.
[José Ortega Y Gasset, 1883-1955].

As a national conscript in the army's Civilian Force, I have had to attend several obligatory 'refresher-camps' during the 1960s and 1970s, and, as soon I had it finished, I was reeled in by the South African Commando Services to do border-duty in South Africa's bushveldt area, in proximity to South Africa's border with Botswana.

This was after we conscripts had been solemnly promised during our basic training in 1966 that no conscript who had completed his six obligatory refresher-camps would ever be eligible for national-duty again, save for actual home-guard duty in the event of war. In fact, had it not been for the 1994 democratic elections, it probably would have ended in a life-sentence of intermittent conscription-duty on behalf of our apartheid masters.

My basic training spanned from January 1966 until the end of September 1966, and I was first stationed for three months in the training camp of Voortrekkerhoogte; thereafter for three months in the bush in the outskirts of Pretoria in preparation for the May 1966 Republic Festival celebrations to conclude my mandatory conscription duty of 9 months during its final 3 months at Oudtshoorn (pronounced 'Oats-whirrin') in the Karoo's South Western Districts, about a thousand kilometres farther south.

Afterwards and over the years I had duly completed several mandatory 'refresher-camps', e.g., at Bon Accord Dam and Voortrekkerhoogte in Pretoria respectively; at Port Alfred in the Eastern Cape; at Spitskop in Potchefstroom (Northwest Province) and at De Brug (Afrikaans/Dutch: 'The Bridge') in Bloemfontein. This is now of course disregarding all the obligatory Commando camps I anyway have had to attend much later (1986-1994) in the Bushveldt-area where we had been living at the time. At that stage it was only the Americans, Rhodesians and Israelis, as far as I can recall, who had been adhering to a more gruelling conscription-regime that ours, although the scenario must have changed considerably since then.

One observation is that the army apparently has this morbid obsession with all kinds of extremes that could have been amusing had it not been so darn tragic. Usually, when we were on a bush-camp engaged in manoeuvres, we either had to wash out of a bucket with icy cold water, or, alternatively, shower or bathe in icy cold water. At Ellisras in the north of our Limpopo-province one year we have had to shower in scalding-hot water after the highly sophisticated and innovative gas-driven system had begun to malfunction. This we accomplished by, just as was the case with very cold water, jumping in and out of the water in short bursts, like an obedient dog jumping through a hoop, or, more accurately, like the quartz-crystal oscillator in modern quartz crystal clocks that vibrates at 32, 708 Hz, but with us jumping only a little bit slower.

It was at De Brug where this saga of trouble with the army happened. Our lieutenant came to us one morning and commenced briefing us on an important convoy that was expected to arrive in Bloemfontein, the capital of the Orange Free State, the next day. This convoy, which consisted of a large contingent of army-vehicles comprising jeeps, land-rovers, trucks, light-panzer and other miscellaneous army-vehicles, apparently had to be escorted by staff attached to our military-police corps through the outskirts of the city of Bloemfontein. The route involved built-up civilian residential areas, hence the injunction to escort the convoy safely through.

My brief was as follows: I was to be dropped off at 0500 hours (5am) at my point-of-duty (on the envisaged route) at a four-way junction installed with traffic-lights in the outskirts of

Bloemfontein. Many other conscripts were to be dropped-off at points-of-duty along the route in a similar manner, while others were assigned the duty of escorting the convoy on motorcycles and in jeeps. It was clearly a well-conceived plan with inputs also from the local High Command, and the convoy was expected to pass my junction at 0600 hours, i.e., at 6 a.m.

Upon the arrival of the convoy, which would be announced by the frantic flashing of headlights by the jeeps leading the convoy, I was to bring all traffic at that junction to an immediate halt regardless of the status of the traffic lights, and further ensure that the convoy, travelling at the regulation 60 kmh, passed thought the four-way junction unmolested by civilian traffic and without the unnecessary inconvenience of stopping at the traffic lights.

I was literally dropped off from the back of a Bedford army-truck at 0500 hours the following morning, and it was so cold (about - 6°C) that, when my feet hit the ground, it felt as if they had been fashioned from frozen glass. I then settled down to reconnoitre my environment: There were many shops adjacent to the four-way traffic-light junction and, except for rows and rows of residential homes, nothing else of importance. I therefore proceeded to settle in at my point-of-duty for the great wait until 0600 hours in the faithful tradition of, *"Hurry up and wait!"*

However, 0600 hours eventually came, but strangely enough, nothing happened. At 0610 hours ... still nothing. At 0620 hours ... still nothing. At 0645 hours ... still nothing. At 0700 hours I again looked at my watch ... but still nothing. In vain I stared up the road like searching for an orphaned cat, from where the convoy was supposed to have arrived, but all I could see were rows and rows of houses, shops and civilian vehicles increasingly cluttering the road. At 0710 hours I started counting the shop-windows adjacent to my junction, about 20 paces from where I was standing. Some shop-owners were beginning to arrive for work wrapped in scarves and woollen gloves, and some without.

At 0730 hours I was beginning to lose faith in my instructions and was seriously contemplating giving up on the project. It had become clear that no convoy was ever going to arrive, and that it must either have been a misunderstanding of some sorts or a monumental hoax played on the troops. I decided to wait a little while nevertheless, for there was nothing as treacherous and reprehensible as a soldier abandoning his post and his duty. At 0740 hours I looked, but still ... nothing. I then decided that I would wait until 0800 hours, and if the convoy had by then not pitched, I was going to walk to the nearest payphone or anyone for that matter to try and inquire about the whereabouts of the convoy.

At 0800 hours I started at a leisurely pace toward the rows of shops and, while now and then glancing up the street to ascertain that nothing even remotely resembling a convoy was en route to my junction, commenced with some interesting window-shopping proper. What a relief it was to get away from that boring junction ... I mean, how can they drop a person off at such a hellhole of desolation and then never endeavour to speak to him again?

At about 0810 hours, while I was still merrily busy with window-shopping when the early-morning silence was suddenly broken by the frantic blowing of horns, the frenzied screeching of tyres and the frenetic waving of hands. I turned around with a start and what did I see? Civilian cars all over the place: Some veering, some dodging army vehicles of all kinds and some trying to brake in time at the junction to avoid collisions.

"The convoy is late ... the damn convoy is late!" I thought. *"Where were the lights? Have they flashed ... why haven't they flashed?!"*

The convoy had sprung on my junction out of the blue like a diabolical cavalcade from an evil abyss, and the fact that the convoy on that fateful morning had passed through that junction without a serious collision or anybody getting killed was a miracle.

When later (back at the camp) I had to face my lieutenant my questions, defences, and excuses (even to my own ears) rang as empty and void of logic as the empty rations-store in the NCO's

army mess, or like a brown paper-bag with the last donut eaten by the dog. For the first time in my young and irresponsible little life I understood the meaning of Lord Alfred Tennyson's 1854 poem *'The Charge of the Light Brigade'* written in commemoration of the 'Battle of Balaclava' on 25 October 1854 of the Crimean War. I quote from three verses only, courtesy of Wikipedia:

"Forward, the Light Brigade! Was there a man dismay'd? Not tho' the soldiers knew; Some one had blunder'd: Their's not to make reply, Their's not to reason why, Their's but to do and die: Into the valley of Death Rode the six hundred.

"Cannon to right of them, Cannon to left of them, Cannon in front of them Volley'd and thunder'd; Storm'd at with shot and shell, Boldly they rode and well, Into the jaws of Death, Into the mouth of Hell Rode the six hundred.

"When can their glory fade? O the wild charge they made! All the world wonder'd. Honour the charge they made! Honour the Light Brigade, Noble six hundred!"

The last thing I remembered before the convoy crossed the dangerous junction (at what looked like at breakneck speed) was the sight of my lieutenant sitting in the front jeep, red as a beet and probably mouthing blue murder for the idiot that had (literally and figuratively) left his post at such a critical junction and juncture in time.

References

1. Britannica. *Bushveld region, Africa.* Online 2022.
2. Britannica.com. *Battle of Balaklava. Crimean War [1854].* Online 2022.
3. SAHistory.org.za. *Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA).* Online 2022.
4. South-Africa.Worldplaces.me *De Brug. Army Base, Bloemfontein.* Online 2022.
5. Wikipedia. *Alfred, Lord Tennyson.* Online 2022.
6. Wikipedia. *Charge of the Light Brigade. (Battle).* Online 2022.
7. Wikipedia. *Commando System. South Africa.* Online 2022.
8. Wikipedia. *Crimean War.* Online 2022.
9. Wikipedia. *Israeli Defence Forces.* Online 2022.
10. Wikipedia. *Karoo.* Online 2022.
11. Wikipedia. *Lephalale (Ellisras).* Online 2022.
12. Wikipedia. *Limpopo Province.* Online 2022.
13. Wikipedia. *Negotiations to end apartheid in South Africa.* Online 2022.
14. Wikipedia. *Non-Commisioned Officer (NCO).* Online 2022.
15. Wikipedia. *North-West (South African province).* Online 2022.
16. Wikipedia. *Oudtshoorn.* Online 2022.
17. Wikipedia. *Potchefstroom.* Online 2022.
18. Wikipedia. *Rhodesia Bush War.* Online 2022.
19. Wikipedia. *The Charge of the Light Brigade (Poem).* Online 2022.
20. ZA.Geoview.info. *Spitskop Hill, North-West, South Africa.* Online 2022.

16

Ode to a Wheelbarrow

He is so unlucky that he runs into accidents which started to happen to somebody else.
[Don Marquis, 1878-1937]

"Have you ever fallen over a wheelbarrow in the dark?" asked my colleague, AlexB., while we were standing at the coffee-machine in our office, about thirty years ago. Strange that he should ask such a question, but Alex has always been like that, a real fun type of a guy, seeing the funny side of life in everything he did. He was the one who first had introduced me to the books of Jerome K. Jerome. *"Have you?"* he insisted, looking at me with his curious blue-green eyes. I hesitated.

My memories of wheelbarrows always used to be, come to think of it, rather positive. It was only late in young adulthood that I began to equate wheelbarrows with gardening and backbreaking work. Nevertheless, there was the time, as a young four-year old, when I loved to sit in our rusty old wheelbarrow in the backyard of our house in Randgate, South Africa, eating a 'Granny Smith' apple from our own apple tree.

It was cold, but with a surprisingly amiable sun throwing its warm yellow rays over out little village, its residents mostly in mining, manufacturing and railways and others in retail. Others were either small businessmen of various kinds, or schoolteachers and salesmen. Randgate may have been a small, nondescript little village, but it was founded on some of the wealthiest goldfields on the planet at the turn of the 19th century, not far from Johannesburg, about an hour's drive with a 1000cc. convertible, 1950s Morris Minor.

In Randgate we had our own quarry (for sand and soil), a post office, a primitive abattoir and a thriving butchery with its floor covered in the regulation sawdust of those days; a dairy; several grocery shops; some café's, the two or three indispensable good fish-and-chips joints, some general dealers and hardware shops, but no fancy, upmarket restaurants. Malls did not exist yet, but on Saturdays we often our bustling main street was replete with horse-drawn buggies from rural areas in town on shopping sprees.

On the matter of the wheelbarrow: In winter I used to sit in the wheelbarrow, you know, by sitting on the edge and tipping the wheelbarrow into an upright position with its handles on the ground and the wheel up in the air, the ideal position for basking in the miserly but welcome remnant of a sun on winter-afternoons, just like a typical little rock-badger where it stood near to the huge Granny Smith apple-tree with its rich harvest of large green apples every season.

There is still some magic in the memory of Mr. B, our neighbour, taking his pocket-knife and deftly peeling the large green apples in our backyard while friends and neighbours sat chatting under the tree, the same neighbour whose wife had lost little 3-year-old DirkieB. in a falling accident and, tragically, was later to, out of grief, jump to her death under a train.

"Why I am asking", Alex interjected, "*... is because I have observed that there is a specific order in nature in which one is inclined to fall over a wheelbarrow in the dark."*

He, fiddling with the coffee machine and stirring in some sugar, was getting impatient and wanted an answer, and was clearly not going to butt-off until he had milked it out of me. What he did not appreciate is the fact that the whole idea of falling, especially falling in public, was an embarrassing matter ... I usually didn't like to talk about it. I mean, will I ever forget the night during the late 1970s when my two buddies and I were walking in the neighbouring town of

Vereeniging when, in the dark, we had turned up the wrong alley in search of some 'public conveniences'?

As we strolled down this shadowy alley, we did not notice that, at the turn, I had in the meantime taken what was supposed to be the left-hand side, and they the right-hand side, of an alley that had been divided into two 'walks' separated by an old, dilapidated diamond-mesh or chicken-wire fence, about waist-high.

At the point where we had guessed the entrance to those 'conveniences' were expected to be, my friend, TonyM., a tall and lanky Englishman whose father was a magistrate, said: *"Here we are ... right turn!"* It was winter, and when I turned, I turned with my hands snugly entrenched in my duffle-coat pockets when, the next moment, I stumbled over that contemptible little invisible fence in the dark. There I was, suspended in mid-air and swinging to and fro across the fence like a suit of clothes on a rail, my hands in my pockets and with me, totally incapacitated, unable to get off the fence. Of course, they eventually did help me off again, but that was only after they had finished laughing, a good time later.

I can still remember the day in 1960, when I was 12 years old and was giving my brother (8) a lift through the main street of our village on my large, green balloon-tyre bicycle. It was much too large for me, and my brother had been sitting on the frame when I lost control and we crashed right there in the middle of the street. It was a busy Saturday morning, and the cars were coming and going, with me lying on top of the bicycle, and the bicycle on top of my younger brother.

More embarrassing, however, was the time when I was the young manager of a furniture shop in Bothaville in the Orange Free State. I had been sitting on a swivel-chair in my little manager's cubicle in the shop when my ruler fell off the table and I had to pick it up. Instead of getting out of my chair and picking the ruler up, I decided to go one smarter and lean over in my chair to pick it up. True to its smart scientific design and innovative ergonomic temperament, the chair 'swivelled' and fell over ... but with the added complication of me still in it. It was some time until I had gathered enough courage to stick my head up to see if anyone had seen the incident and the resulting commotion, but strangely everybody was pretending not to have noticed.

Yes, the wheelbarrow invoked reminiscences of hard work, transporting garden-soil and helping with establishing the modest little front-lawn of our house as a child. But my memories of wheelbarrows were not necessarily all painful. For instance, my daughter, who worked for some years as a fulltime young missionary in Marseille, France, the city where the resurrected Lazarus (from the Bible) is rumoured to have 'finally' died, used to relate the story to us of how she, when they were on a recent visit to Africa and when she couldn't fall asleep one night, went outside instead into the stygian darkness of rural Zimbabwe, and, finding a wheelbarrow in some remote spot, proceeded to sit on it just like I used to do as a child, looking up to the illustrious black, velvet African canopy with its billions of stars glittering like jewels in the sky. Wheelbarrows are, it would appear, not all always that bad.

"So, Piet, have you ever fallen over a wheelbarrow in the dark?" AlexB. asked, clearly nearing the end of his tether. Come to think of it, I have fallen many times in my life, too many times to remember, some of them even actually funny. The funniest fall I have ever seen, however, happened when I was in the South African Army at Oudtshoorn[7] in the arid, Karoo-area of our country, just about finishing my stint in 1966 as a conscript in our Civilian Force.

The guy in question was old Smithy, a fellow 'conscript' military-policeman serving 'time' with me at the offices of the military police at the Infantry School in Oudtshoorn. It so transpired that, on this morning, rumour was afoot that disgruntled (civilian) labourers in the army-base were going to go on strike that day. The rumour further intimated that the contingent of strikers, i.e., chefs, cooks, sanitary cleaners and all and diverse kinds of other manual labourers, were going to march in order to arrive at about 11am at our offices in proximity of the main gate, where they were going to confront the sergeant-in-charge of our military-police unit and also hand over a signed petition to him, containing their portfolio of grievances, at the same time.

The strikers arrived on time, and our sergeant-in-charge went out of the office to occupy a commanding position in the middle of the road on the tarmac, just in front of the gate and the 'charge-office' to 'receive' (read confront) his 'guests' (read belligerents) with the dignity and military decorum that they 'deserved' (yeah right!).

Now, our sergeant-in-charge, SergeantM., was a chain-smoker, and while the strikers were handing over the petition and animatedly and highly agitated, explaining the rationale behind the strike, he, clearly stressed and pretending to be listening with the regulation quota of empathy, all the while, however, was blowing smoke into the sky like Puff the Magic Dragon, with thick, blue, copious clouds of smoke billowing upwards and swirling around his head, unfortunately eventually creating the image of a rather dangerous (and jumpy) adversary to be considered and not to be handled without gloves, almost like a hot-water boiler wearing pants and an army hat.

In the meantime, we conscripts had taken in all kinds of strategic positions all over the place to present a united front, should things threatened to get out of hand. I had taken in a position across the road from the offices on the side of the road. Some of the guys were standing on the stoep of the offices, while Smithy was standing on the lawn in front of the offices, with his lit pipe in his mouth, smoking away with both his hands in his pockets, admittedly a quite unmilitary posture for a military policeman to assume.

The situation was growing more intense and more volatile by the minute, with SergeantM. blowing more and more smoke and arguing and gesticulating, and with the strikers protesting, demurring and complaining loudly about the alleged unfairness of the army-authorities.

At some point it looked, surprisingly, as if the crowd were after all actually going to disperse (for now), and that is when it happened: Smithy must have moved from where he had stood, apparently satisfied that an amicable settlement between the belligerents was on the cards, and, with his pipe still in his mouth and his hands still deep in his trouser-pockets, turned around in order to return to the office, but with a shocked, *"Whaaaa ...!"* and with an ungainly flailing of arms and knees, falling nonchalantly over the makeshift little fence of a silver-painted iron-chain (about knee-high) that had been behind him all the time but which he apparently had completely forgotten about. He had fallen smack-bang into a bed of gorgeous yellow and orange Barberton daisies, beautifully in bloom and SergeantM.'s sacred personal garden property and much-cherished pride and joy. It surely must have been just about the most ungainly of military manoeuvres ever performed by a soldier in uniform in our outfit.

Everyone in the crowd (except for SergeantM., why I could never ascertain) erupted into roaring laughter, with Smithy emerging from the daisies, flustered, his pipe gone and with him much embarrassed but none really the worse for his experience. SergeantM. was, in the meantime, trying to maintain his composure and the general military decorum of the moment, but it must have been very difficult for him to engineer with the dishevelled Smithy peering red-faced from between the daisies and me doubling up and laughing myself out of breath on the opposite side of the road. The upshot from Smithy's downfall (pardon the pun) however, was that the strike was over. Incredibly, the comic incident had apparently broken the labour impasse. We could all go 'home'.

Another excruciating fall was the one in Cowies Hill in Durban in 2012, when I missed my step at a guesthouse where I had been staying and tumbled all the way down into a hedge of rose-trees in bloom and had to be rescued by other patrons on the premises. But for now, the question remained:

"Have I ever fallen over a wheelbarrow in the dark?"

Yes, I have, I thought ... but why was the issue so important to Alex?

"You see, Peter," Alex continued, "*... there exists a certain protocol that Mother Nature forces upon you for you to follow when you fall over a wheelbarrow. Never forget that ... the next time you fall over a wheelbarrow, check for yourself whether I was right or not! When one falls over a wheelbarrow in the dark, the following procedure, with few exceptions, is usually followed by the 'fallee' in question ... and mark my words, it cannot be helped, it apparently has something to do with the enigmatic anatomy of the average wheelbarrow:*

"First, one falls over the wheelbarrow; the second stage is when one falls on top of the wheelbarrow; and the third stage when the wheelbarrow, in turn, falls on top of you. Don't ask me to explain it, I can't. Don't try to understand it either; it is one of those mysterious, inexorable and unavoidable laws of Nature!"

Of course, I found the story absurd, though amusing, and went home to relate it to my wife and kids with great relish, that very day, not that I had taken Alex' warning seriously ... after all, what hogwash, a 'law of Nature'!

Be that as it may, AlexB. sadly, died not long afterwards in a mine accident at Tshikondeni in Venda (in the northern province) when they, an entire proto-team of about nine people, that had been called out to rescue a loco-driver stuck in a rock-fall (Officially: 'fall- of-ground') in the mine, were killed in an after-shock that triggered an even worse rock-fall than the first. Ironically, the loco-driver for whom the rescue-effort was first launched, was later saved, and extracted alive

But, I had almost completely forgotten about old Alex's story (it was so many years ago) when recently, one evening at a church just outside Johannesburg, I was standing on the platform of that church-hall, where my wife and I had been part of a band performing for the congregation, when I missed the platform with my left foot, tripped over the heavy chair standing right there and fell all the distance of about one metre, fortuitously landing on my back on the thick carpet in the aisle alongside the platform with a considerable thud.

As my left knee was temporarily disabled, I could not get up, and while the bystanders were trying to help me up, I realised that, in the commotion, I must have grabbed the chair (over which I tripped after I had missed the platform with my left foot) in order to stabilise myself with the hope of preventing an incapacitating fall, but with which I nevertheless went over the edge with it still frantically grasped in my right hand, and with the chair eventually landing on top of me, in the process actually cutting a quite respectable little gash into my forehead.

Then the realisation struck me ... I had, for all practical purposes, fallen over the chair, then had fallen on the chair and, eventually, the heavy chair had fallen on top of me. Amazingly, my friend, AlexB., with his uncanny gift for observation, was, in principle, proved to be right after all.

References

1. Britannica.com. *Lazarus/Biblical Accounts.* Online 2022.
2. Britannica.com. *Zimbabwe.* Online 2022.
3. Gem.wiki. *Tshikondeni Coal Mine.* Online 2022.
4. IMDb.com. *Puff, the Magic Dragon.* Online 2022.
5. Krugerpark.co.za. *Barberton Daisy/South African Flowers.* Online 2022.
6. SAVenues.co.za. *Cowies Hill Estate.* Online 2022.
7. Wikipedia. *Don Marquis.* Online 2022.
8. Wikipedia. *Durban.* Online 2022.
9. Wikipedia. *Granny Smith.* Online 2022.
10. Wikipedia. *Jerome K. Jerome.* Online 2022.
11. Wikipedia. *Johannesburg.* Online 2022.
12. Wikipedia. *Karoo.* Online 2022.
13. Wikipedia. *Marseille.* Online 2022.
14. Wikipedia. *Morris Minor 1000.* Online 2022.
15. Wikipedia. *Oudtshoorn.* Online 2022.
16. Wikipedia. *South African Infantry School/Oudtshoorn.* Online 2022.

17. Wikipedia. *Venda Language*. Online 2022.
18. Wikipedia. *Venda.* Online 2022.
19. Wikipedia. *Vereeniging.* Online 2022.

17

Fish and Chips in Thabazimbi

A man seldom thinks with more earnestness of anything than he does of his dinner.
[Dr. Samuel Johnson, 1709-1784]

It was a miserable, drizzling and surprisingly cold morning when, during one of our so-called 'mild' Bushveldt winters, I decided to go and purchase a packet of steaming hot (and as decadent as possible) fresh fish-and-chips (i.e., 'French fries') at some 'take-away' establishment in our town, Thabazimbi.

I was upbeat, as I have only recently been promoted and really liked my job as a corporate trainer in my company. My wife had a satisfying (if a trifle enervating at times) job at the local branch of the First National Bank and our two kids were happily doing well in school.

Bear in mind that the people from the Bushveldt, in general, like to eat, and for dinner, mostly thick beefsteaks, juicy lamb-chops or spicy pork-chops direct from the braai (barbeque) with their plates embellished with lots of tossed salads drenched in appetizing salad oils and sauces, the optional (raw) carrot-salad or beetroot-salad, either accompanied by a creamy potato-salad or the Bushveldt favourite ... 'mieliepap en sous' (cornmeal mush and gravy).

On this day, however, I was planning to just pop out of the office for a few minutes, drive down to the shop about three kilometres away and then return in time for me to finish my lunch before I commenced with my tasks after the regulation forty minutes or so of allotted lunchtime had expired.

I arrived at the shop, a sort of 'superette' where they sold all sorts of fast-foods, groceries, fruits and vegetables etc., and when I arrived, there were, obviously, other customers and patrons also milling around and buying stuff ... after all, the place was quite popular and pretty well-managed by its plucky little Portuguese proprietor.

I walked over to the fast-foods counter and noticed a guy standing there in blue overalls waiting for an order to be carried out, but I didn't pay much attention to him, as I was (understandably) in a hurry. The shop-assistant turned around and looked at me, indicating with her courteous body language (!) that I was to place my order with her.

"One packet of fish and chips please," I said. She nodded her approval and then vanished as quickly as she had appeared. Some moments later she reappeared with a food parcel in her hands ... it was fish- and-chips, still sizzling hot from the oil in which it was fried. She picked up a large container of vinegar and proceeded to dump all its dreadful contents on the food (at least that was what it looked like) when I interjected vehemently, objecting to the copious amounts of acidic condiment she was going to drown the stuff in. *"Wow ... take it slowly, not so much vinegar please!"* She slowed down considerably and then, cautiously, dribbled only a very modest amount of vinegar on the food, all the while prudently monitoring my reaction as she went.

Then she picked up that huge container of salt (table salt, *'sodium chloride'* to be specific). It was a spice-dispenser of considerable dimensions standing there in all its naked power and authoritative glory. The message was clear: Nobody was going to leave that shop without salt on their food ... and the more, the merrier.

Again, I interjected: *"Wow! Not so much salt please ... take it easy!"* The shop-assistant then proceeded with the same procedure as last time, sprinkling a modest quota of the salt cautiously over the food while all the time carefully checking my reaction, just to play it safe. She was taking no chances with this impertinent bully looming so menacingly over the counter.

Afterwards, she deftly rolled up the parcel in the regulation white paper (they usually do), scribbled a little docket for the cashier and ... handed the parcel with the docket to the guy

standing next to me in the blue overalls! Then it dawned on me: It wasn't my parcel, it was his. After all, I suddenly realised, he was there first, before me! The shop-assistant must have mistaken me for a health-inspector or something, hence her no-nonsense compliance to my insolent 'commands'.

The poor guy in the blue overalls looked indignant and unhappy, to say the least; he must have been close to assaulting me there and then. He took his parcel, shoved it under his arm and, while walking in the direction of the door, suddenly turned, looked at me as if I owed him a lot of money, shook his head and said, *"Tschh!"*

I was only later told that, in his language and culture, the expression, "*Tschh!"* was a swear-word (cussword indicating disapproval) reserved only for the grossest and most disagreeable of cases and people thinkable.

References

1. FirstNationalBank.com.gh. *First National Bank*. Online 2022.
2. Lifewithclottedcream.com. *The Ultimate Guide to South African Mieliepap*. Online 2022.
3. Wikipedia. *Portugal.* Online 2022.
4. Wikipedia. *Portuguese Language.* Online 2022.
5. Wikipedia. *Samuel Johnson*. Online 2022.
6. Wikipedia. *Thabazimbi.* Online 2022.

18

The Friendly Puff-Adder

When a stupid man is doing something he is ashamed of, he always declares that it is his duty.
[Apollodorus, *Ceasar and Cleopatra,* George Bernard Shaw, 1856-1950)

They say that ignorance is bliss, and, at our training centre where I used to work as a corporate trainer, all of us had also been thoroughly briefed on that magic adage with which the training department always tried to dazzle line management, i.e., *"If you think training is expensive, try ignorance"*. But I am now reminiscing of a type of ignorance decades ago when I was still fresh out of school and the blush of youth still detectable on my lean, gaunt cheeks. The ignorance I am referring to involve a snake.

Now snakes are a curious breed. I once read about a common little 'house snake' (no more than a few centimetres in length) being caught by a spider in its web. How the spider was going to eat the snake I do not know and cannot conceive, probably little-by-little. On another occasion I read about a monstrous black mamba, surely one of the most venomous snakes in Africa, if not in the world, that had to be fed live rodents for its meals in the zoo where it was kept. So, true to form, the zookeeper one day opened the cage and dropped a little critter of a rodent inside the enclosure where the black mamba was shacking up.

When the zookeeper arrived for work the next morning, he discovered the black mamba lying dead on the floor in its cage. It was killed by the rodent; the little rodent, crafty little ruffian that it apparently was, apparently had crept up to the catnapping snake and discovered the soft flesh in the neck of the mamba. It then had taken hold, bitten, and gnawed on that vulnerable spot without relenting until the deadly reptile, taking by complete surprise, eventually succumbed.

Some wildlife experts believe that the best way to kill a life-threatening snake apparently is to hit it across its back with a heavy stick. In his book, *'Tavern of the Seas'*, Lawrence G. Green writes:

> *"So when you come across a snake, stand perfectly still until it moves off. The best way to kill a snake is by hitting it in the middle of the back with a stick. Although the head is the most vital point, it is hard to hit; and if missed it gives the snake a chance to strike. By breaking its back it is rendered helpless and the head can be dealt with at leisure."*
> [Green: 117].

Some interesting facts about snakes:

- *"Two drops of yellow cobra venom are enough to kill a man.*

- *Puff-Adders bring forth their young alive and even a tiny puff-adder can inflict a terrifying bit.*

- *A snakebite in the ankle is a serious matter owing to the mass of veins and the main artery there.*

- *A Mr. Hoosain Mia (63) was bitten on his right thumb outside the iconic Mount Nelson Hotel in Cape Town in February 1941 and by the time he reached the hospital it was too late to save him."*

[Green: 116-117].

Anyway, isn't it ironical that the first letters of the names of three of the deadliest (and grisliest) members of the animal kingdom each begin with an 'S'? (i.e., snakes, spiders and scorpions). It is interesting to note that (I quote):

> "*One spider in the Cape Peninsula possesses venom four times more virulent, bulk for bulk, than that of the cobra. This is the dreaded button-spider, the knopiespinnekop of the wheat-belt, known to scientists as a member of the notorious Theridiidae family, a close relative of the 'Black Widow' of California."*
>
> [Green: 117].

About the existence of sea serpents, I am not sure, but Lawrence G. Green writes:

> *"Sea serpents have been reported in Table Bay on several occasions. Mr. Murray, the Green Point lighthouse-keeper, saw an 'immense creature' close inshore one evening in February 1857. Dr. Biccard, superintendent of the Somerset Hospital, was another eyewitness who described this monster to the newspapers. It was about 150 feet in length, with a bulbous, white-spotted head and dark, slender body. Sketches were made and reproduced in the 'Illustrated London News'.*
>
> [Green:186].

> *"Mr. Fairbridge and his friend, Mr. G.D. Brunette, were fishing at Camp's Bay when they saw what they thought at first was a whale. Very soon, however, they noticed that this creature was 200 feet in length."*
>
> [Green: 187].

This Mr. Fairbridge reportedly then remarked that this animal was a sea serpent of which he never had the slightest doubt. Captain M'Quhae of H.M.S. Daedalus, describes a serpent he had seen in 1848:

> "*It was discovered to be an enormous serpent, with head and shoulders kept four feet constantly above the surface of the sea. As nearly as we could approximate by comparing it with the length of what our main-topsail yard would show in the water, there was at very least sixty feet of the animal, a fleur d'eau, no portion of which was, to our perception, used in propelling it through the water, either by vertical or horizontal undulation."*
>
> [Green: 187].

> *"A marine creature 57 feet long was killed by the bows of the Armadale Castle in 1905 in latitude three degrees south. It was named 'Piscis Rudyardensis' because Mr. Kipling was on board at the time ... the tail of the monster reached from the bows to the ship's carpenter's porthole, 48 feet away, and its head was about nine feet from the bow on the other side of the ship. As the monster could not escape, the ship's engines were reversed. Eventually it slipped off and sank."*
>
> [Green: 188].

James Clarke, in his book, '*Man is the Prey*", describes the snake (as a reptile) as:

> " ... *just one long narrow rib cage with a head at the end."*
>
> [Clarke: 109].

He further writes:

> *"Of the world's 3000 kinds of snakes only 300 have well developed venom apparatus and of these fifty are sea snakes which very rarely bother man. Only about 150 species of land snakes can be regarded as really dangerous to man. Some are exceptionally dangerous, in fact one of them, the 'king cobra', is considered by many zoologists to be the most lethal animal in the world."*
>
> [Clarke: 112].

Clarke, however, further emphasizes:

> *" The bites of most sea snakes cause a high mortality rate and although there is no specific antivenin a polyvalent serum with an elapidine component is customarily used. The venom is similar in character to the cobras."*
>
> [Clarke: 118].

It is possible that, at the time of my writing, the medical technology available for the treatment of snakebite had in the meantime considerably improved. Also, the last time I checked, New Zealand and Hawaii were reportedly free of snakes, and it is reportedly forbidden to take snakes into these countries for either research or for zoos.

When I was working on that iron-ore mine in the Bushveldt, snakes used to be embarrassingly abundant, and I suppose they still are ... the South African Bushveldt is an animal lover's paradise.

It was nothing strange to see pythons basking in the sun in winter on rocks in around the 'koppies' (rocky outcrops) of our little Bushveldt village. During the late 1980s we, for instance, once also have had to make use of the services of a local game-expert to come and remove an Iguana, a lizard (reptile) of about half-a-metre long, from our house where it had taken refuge, what for I wouldn't know ... maybe it was running away from something. The expert eventually caught the lizard where it had escaped into, of all places, the engine- compartment of our car. Apparently, reptiles sometimes seek out places of warmth, especially during winter months. The interesting thing was that this person, a wildlife expert, had a 'pet' (African rock) python up in the ceiling of his house to keep his rat-plague in check.

Another colleague, a man called WolfB., was once photographed where he stood not far from my office at the mine with a 9 ft. (about 3 metres) dead black mamba dangling from his fist. I once sauntered by accident over a little green mamba where it was entrenched in a little storm-water gully (covered with an iron-grid) in front of my office (over which I had to step to exit my office) and where it was peeking periscope-like through the grid with his head to spy on who knows what. Some green stalks of weed also jutting through the grid had served as a perfect camouflage for this highly toxic, still juvenile, individual.

On our way to Church one evening, I stepped on something that felt like a very slippery, gooey banana-peel only to see a green 'boomslang' (tree snake) spread out on the pavement which gave us all a considerable fright. I surmise, however, that it must have been run over by a car a little earlier because normally it would have struck at me in self-defence.

The venom of all the snakes that I have just mentioned is, without exception, highly toxic and can cost a person his life. Simon Keyes, the British snake catcher operating from Durban, South Africa, will probably never approve the killing of any snake. He catches them in residential areas to release them back into the wild.

An experience in the Bushveldt I will probably never forget was the day that I had just stopped beneath a big, shady 'Maroela' tree and, as soon I had switched off the car, I suddenly felt something beginning to slither up my left side, very slowly, all the way underneath my arm up toward my right shoulder. *"Snake!"* I instinctively thought, and my blood immediately ran cold.

Cars in South Africa are right-hand drive so, after the initial shock, I was beginning to regain my composure and evaluating my chances for survival in the event of each of the two available options, i.e., should I just stay put ... or should I jump out of the car?

While I was still contemplating the most prudent option to select, I looked down and what did I see? My seatbelt-buckle had inadvertently slipped out of the clasp installed on the floor between the two bucket-seats and that was the loathsome thing that had all the time been slithering up my sides like a demon-serpent from 'Dante's Inferno'.

When I was in my early twenties, a friend and I decided one evening to go play 'camping out', so we took some sleeping bags and stuff and rode over to a huge man-made eucalyptus plantation-type of a forest not far from our home in Carletonville. Upon arrival we immediately started looking out for a suitable spot in which to settle for the night (it was only to be for the one night).

At dusk we noticed a brownish snake slithering through the bush not far from where we had made our 'beds', so we decided to scare the critter off with some sticks and stuff. Being ignorant about the bush and especially about snakes, we approached the snake, a thick, heavy, copper-brown type of snake with a huge, bulbous head that looked somewhat lazy, sluggish and easy to manipulate.

We chased and chafed the snake with sticks until we had manipulated it into a rusty empty tin, eventually ending up in the same predicament as the dog who had chased and caught the automobile ... wondering what to do with it: Take it to the school perhaps as a specimen for the biology class? Kill it? Let it go?

But, while we were dawdling and dallying about our next move, the snake had in the meantime decided to make up our minds for us and silently slithered out of the tin, merrily escaping (unharmed) into the bushes on the perimeter of our little makeshift 'camp'.

Later, when I was sitting snugly at home and paging through my collection of books in front of our lit fireplace, I discovered how close to death we had been. The snake that we had handled in the bush and fooled around with so irresponsibly was a puff-adder, one of the most venomous on the continent. James Clarke writes:

> *"One or two men have claimed to have met people who are immune, but there is no shadow of doubt that nobody can survive the full bite of a mamba, or a krait, or a tiger snake, or a puff-adder, or a diamond-back rattler unless he has received antivenin."*
>
> [Clarke: 115].

Mambas can grow up to 12 feet, king cobras up to 16 feet. Snakes have no ears and are deaf ... they can hear only through vibrations coming via the ground. According to Clarke (Clarke: 125), the black mamba is the snake probably with the most dangerous bite on the African continent and it is said that even an Olympic runner cannot outrun it, although the puff-adder *('Bitis arietans')*, the one that we fooled around with, is beyond doubt the biggest killer in Africa.

Note the peculiar talent of the 'innocent' little snake we had been fooling around with: It has been told that the puff-adder can turn around, even in flight, 'stab-bite' its pursuer with its deadly fangs and then turn back and proceed with its flight without the human eye even detecting such an action. It reportedly happens in a split second, and only a high-resolution camera set to slow motion will apparently be able to render the captured action visible to the human eye.

Thanks to lots of grace from above and the remarkable gentlemanly restraint (or survival instinct, perhaps) of the puff-adder, I am alive today to tell the tale. So, bear in mind that, if a man gets bitten by a puff-adder, he has about 45 minutes at most to get to the nearest hospital.

References

1. Britannica.com. *George Bernard Shaw*. Online 2022.
2. Clarke, James (1969) *Man is the Prey*. Stein & Day.

3. Green, Lawrence G. (1947) *Tavern of the Seas.* Timmins. Capetown.
4. Krugerpark.co.za. *Marula Tree.* Online 2022.
5. Wikipedia. *Africa.* Online 2022.
6. Wikipedia. *African Rock Python.* Online 2022.
7. Wikipedia. *Button Spider.* Online 2022.
8. Wikipedia. *Hawaii.* Online 2022.
9. Wikipedia. *HMS Daedalus (1826).* Online 2022.
10. Wikipedia. *Iguana.* Online 2022.
11. Wikipedia. *Inferno (Dante).* Online 2022.
12. Wikipedia. *Lawrence G. Green.* Online 2022.
13. Wikipedia. *Mamba.* Online 2022.
14. Wikipedia. *New Zealand.* Online 2022.
15. Wikipedia. *Puff Adder.* Online 2022.

19

Winter in Bloemfontein

The surest way to be deceived is to consider oneself cleverer than others.
[Francois, Duc de la Rochefoucauld, 1613-1680]

Wintertime in Bloemfontein is not cold ... it's bitterly cold. We moved there during high summer in January 1978 shortly after our wedding the previous weekend in Vanderbijlpark further north, settling in the Fichardt Park suburb toward the south of the city. By the way, how interesting to learn that, because of their involvement in the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, how the English have eventually returned home perplexed by the Boers' habit of creating so many place names ending with 'fontein' (fountain), e.g., places like Matjiesfontein, Randfontein, Wonderfontein, Rietfontein, Bloemfontein etc.

So, for some time after the war, the British war veterans reportedly still sarcastically for some time referred to placenames like London, Liverpool and Bristol as 'Londonfontein', 'Liverpoolfontein' and 'Bristolfontein' ... and I cannot blame them.

Nevertheless, our family had bought a shop in the Central Business District (CBD) of Bloemfontein, and I was aiming to (hopefully) help my father turn it around from a dismal failure into a profitable venture. It may interest the reader to know that J.R.R. Tolkien, author of *The Lord of the Rings* and friend of C.S. Lewis, was born in Bloemfontein on 3 January 1892.

About wintertime in Bloemfontein, the reader may or may not recall that Bloemfontein is the capital city of the Orange Free State, one of the nine provinces of South Africa and the city that had played such a prominent role during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. It is also the place where Arthur Conan Doyle, author of Sherlock Holmes and a qualified medical doctor, had served as a volunteer in the British Army's Langman Hospital during the self-same war. At the end of the war, he also published a most memorable history of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 by the title of *The Great Boer War*.

So, there we were, on our way home from church one Sunday when it happened. As I have already alluded to, it was a bright and sunny, yet bitterly cold Bloemfontein morning. At the time we owned a quaint little four-seater sedan known as a Triumph Chicane 2500, a sleek, red, streamlined little 2500 cc. sports-car then widely known in South Africa as 'the poor man's Jaguar'.

It had four gears, and, in lieu of the 5th gear found in more recent model cars, an 'Overdrive' instead. This 'Overdrive', for all practical purposes thus the equivalent of the 5th gear of cars today, was a little black switch on top of the gear-lever in proximity to the agile thumb for quick access and easy manipulation and very convenient. It also helped to reduce fuel consumption on long stretches of road.

Another peculiar characteristic of the 1974-model Triumph Chicane was its bonnet (hood) that opened from the windscreen forward, just opposite the way in which bonnets are inclined to be opened today (from the nose of the car backwards). Now, at this juncture it may be a good idea for the reader to stop and make a mental note of the peculiar way in which the Triumph's bonnet opened, as it has had an important bearing on what was to transpire later.

When we arrived at home, I turned into our driveway and parked the car outside. I remember so clearly ... the neighbours were sitting in their lounge overlooking our yard, and they had drawn all the curtains to allow the warm, Bloemfontein-sun into their otherwise already sunny, north-facing home, while, in the meantime, lounging around as a family, simply basking in the sun and leisurely reading what then appeared to have been a Sunday newspaper.

They also had a good view of us where we were now parked in our driveway, but not that it was their fault, mind you. I mean, they could not have foreseen in a million years what was going to happen next. My problem is that, in certain social settings, I used to be notoriously shy, and the fact that the neighbours were unintentionally, inadvertently watching or observing us (through no fault of their own) was not making things much easier for me.

I say so because my wife had, in the meantime, also disappeared into the house to start with food-preparations, while I had stayed behind to check the car's radiator-water level, oil level, battery-water level and brake-fluid level. Though not a career-mechanic, I was nevertheless quite conscientious in this regard, as I preferred to keep my vehicle in a tip-top shape. I even earlier had special seat covers for the two front bucket seats made, i.e., in a beautiful yellow cloth with black markings, i.e., Scottish 'Tartan' design.

So, there I was, working in my favourite duffle-coat because of the bitter cold and unforgiving, razorblade breeze. The only three cosy places at that moment must surely have been either inside my own lounge, inside the car or ... inside the neighbours' lounge; and there they were, suddenly distracted from their newspapers and lazy post-lunch conversation by a skinny guy in a dark duffle-coat opening the bonnet of his car ... and of all days on a Sunday! Bloemfontein in the 1970s was a quite conservative place, and their interest was immediately aroused; this they simply had to see.

I managed to regain my composure quickly despite the dire circumstances in the neighbouring house militating so violently against it and proceeded to check what I had come to check anyway; it was too late to withdraw now, for if I had cancelled my plans at this late stage of the exercise it would have looked like a silly, cowardly copout. Besides, what was I going to tell my pretty, freckled-face young bride ... that I stopped checking my car because the neighbours were watching me and that I was of the self-conscious, nerdy type who wouldn't work on his car with innocent bystanders watching on?

Okay, so I proceeded anyway and a few minutes later, after being almost finished, I took one final glance at the battery-water levels in the cells of the neat little, 12-volt black battery, replaced the cell-caps and, with a macho swipe of the elegant left hand, slammed down the bonnet of the car with an assertive, no-nonsense thud.

Then my blood ran cold in my veins when it suddenly dawned on me ... I was stuck. A duffle-coat is shorter (and less expensive) than a traditional all-weather, full-length overcoat, and the coat-end of my duffle-coat had been trapped in the bonnet of the car with the awful realisation that I couldn't move an inch; I couldn't go anywhere!

I stole an embarrassed glance at my neighbour's house ... the family next door was still curiously peeping from behind the giant pages, pretending not to be watching me. Not that they wanted to, really, but I must admit, I must have presented a welcoming distraction from the monotonous view of the trees in my yard and the birds on their lawn ... after all, the 1974 Triumph Chicane, at the time, was a real looker of a little car.

I was standing on the passenger-side of the car where the battery-housing was situated making it impossible for me to reach the steering-wheel on the opposite side (right-hand drive) to blow the horn to attract my wife's attention in the hope that she perhaps could come and bail me out of my predicament, but as unobtrusively as possible, of course. The lever opening the bonnet was situated even farther away below the steering-wheel, so there was no way in which I could possibly reach it to release myself from where I was so rudely manacled to my own car.

So, I just stood there, feeling and probably also looking like Moe of the 'Three Stooges', with my duffle-coat stuck in the bonnet and with me checking the validity of the car's license-disk neatly mounted on the passenger-side of the windscreen over and over again like an idiot.

I was playing for time, but it clearly wasn't working. The neighbours' unobtrusively monitoring of those of dumb and ignorant people, but hopefully they were really reading the Sunday-

newspaper ... or weren't they? I did not know for how much longer I was going to be able to convincingly maintain my embarrassing little charade.

At long last my wife appeared in the front door to our house. She had made a pot of Ceylon tea, my favourite, but I was mysteriously not pitching. *"What's wrong ... what's keeping you?"* she inquired, rattled by my protracted absence. I pointed to my duffle-coat stuck in the bonnet: *"I'm stuck ... come get me out of here!"* I replied, but clandestinely, and not too obviously.

"Don't be ridiculous!" she said. *"Why don't you just take off the coat?"* she asked, quite baffled.

That was the day I discovered that, what women lacked in size, brawn, and brute physical strength, they made up in intellectual prowess, and that, gram-for-gram and ounce-for-ounce, women were considerably more intelligent than men.

References

1. Britannica.com. *C.S. Lewis.* Online 2022.
2. Britannica.com. *Liverpool.* Online 2022.
3. CanleyClassics.com. *Chicane/Triumph 2500.* Online 2022.
4. Conan Doyle, Arthur (1900). *The Great Boer War.* Smith, Elder & Co.
5. Healthline.com. *Ceylon Tea.* Online 2022.
6. Tolkien, J.R.R. (1954). *The Lord of the Rings.* Allan & Unwin.
7. Wikipedia. *Bristol.* Online 2022.
8. Wikipedia. *François de la Rochefoucauld.* Online 2022.
9. Wikipedia. *J.R.R. Tolkien.* Online 2022.
10. Wikipedia. *London.* Online 2022.
11. Wikipedia. *Tartan.* Online 2022.
12. Wikipedia. *The Three Stooges.* Online 2022.

20

Calamity Clowns

When you are getting kicked from the rear it means that you are in front.
[Bishop Fulton Sheen, b. 1895]

If the reader had ever watched the movie 'The Out-of-Towners', reading this story may risk sounding very familiar. But, familiar or not ... these events really happened. It all started when, during the early 1970s, my father asked me to drive the eighty or so kilometres to Johannesburg to pick up some textiles and stuff that he needed for our shop in Carletonville. I agreed immediately, as the trip would have given me an ideal opportunity to pick up the golf clubs, I had planned to purchase from a well-known wholesale establishment, i.e., 'The Transvaal Rubber Co.', in the 'City of Gold'.

It so transpired that my friend GerritV. had, in the meantime, agreed to accompany me on the trip to Johannesburg. He had, in fact, invited me to a lunch of kingklip and salads at one of the restaurants in the city. So, there we were that bright morning, on our way to Joburg.

When we arrived in Joburg, I drove straight to the Carlton Centre, at the time the highest skyscraper in the city, where I parked the car in the carpark of the vast complex. We were so upbeat and enthusiastic about the excursion to the city that we neglected to make a mental note of where exactly the car was parked, an error that later in the day was to cost us dearly.

Nevertheless, we immediately started out to the wholesalers to select and pick up the golf-clubs, only about four or five of them. Bear in mind that, as this was during the 1970s, by now my memory had grown a little rusty. So, after we had collected the golf-clubs, we started out toward the restaurant where we were going to have the much-anticipated kingklip-lunch. I was famished and really looking forward to lunch.

When travelling alone I, from habit, used to pop into a little restaurant in Fox Street, directly behind the His Majesty Theatre (now demolished) where I, as an 18-year-old schoolboy in 1965, watched the memorable movie 'My Fair Lady'[2] with my classmates.

His Majesty's' was also the venue during the early 1970s where we (twice) had gone to see Lee Liberace perform on that magnificent three-metre Steinway-grand, backed by Dr. Gordon Robinson's and his fine symphony orchestra (Or was it a dance-band? I never really could tell the difference). I only later learned, in Liberace's autobiography, that Dr. Gordon Robinson did not really have a doctorate in music; the title of 'Doctor' was given to him affectionately apparently only because of his renown as an accomplished musician and conductor ... like an (unofficial) 'honorary degree' of some sorts.

Once we were seated, my friend GerritV. ordered some drinks while we silently deliberated over the appetizing menu in our hands. It was not long before we found the section for fish-dishes, and, when the waiter returned with drinks, my friend placed an order for some succulent kingklip, boiled potato and salads. Wow man, this was going to be fun! Being the son of a miner (a career 'shaft-carpenter') now gone spritely shopkeeper, I was used to hake and French fries on Friday evenings, not kingklip in a posh, upmarket restaurant.

It so transpired (and let it be so recorded in the annals of history and the archives of civilization) that, about halfway through the meal and the chatting and just enjoying the candlelit-dinner, the padded seats and the delectable food, my friend suddenly (but quite unobtrusively at first, I must say) began to make all and diverse kinds of strangely suspect movements with his hands, which reminded me of a circus magician trying to steal his own wallet from his own pocket.

At first, I pretended not to notice, as the last thing I wanted to do was to, psychologically, as a precursory agent be guilty of precipitating the inevitable that I suspected was soon to be announced, i.e., that my friend had lost his wallet. I would not, however, believe it. What's more ... neither would he.

He fumbled and searched and searched and fumbled against all hope; then, mumbling under his breath, fumbled and searched and searched and fumbled some more, but all to no avail. His wallet was gone.

We just sat there, frozen speechless and white with shock, with the rest of the meal suddenly beginning to taste like cardboard sprinkled with confetti. Those were the days when modern conveniences like automatic teller machines, credit-cards and debit-cards (especially in my little 'business' universe) were either uncommon for my socio-economic class or yet unknown. I, however, did possess a chequebook, but I had left it at home, and the cash on hand in my pocket was not remotely enough to cover the cost of the lunch. Today, in retrospect, I find it incredible for an upcoming young 'business-executive' to have been so magnificently naïve for my age, not to speak of my position in the business; after all, at 21 I was a company-director in our family-business for what it was worth.

I had, in the meantime, stopped eating and had pushed the plate away in disgust, while suggesting to my friend that, perhaps we should do the honourable thing and return the food (or what was left of it) to its lawful owner. Technically speaking, I thought, the deal between 'vendor' and 'vendee' had, after all, for all practical intents and purposes, fallen through.

"Don't be ridiculous!" retorted my friend. *"They won't take it back in this condition! Might just as well as finish our lunch while we are trying to come up with a solution. I suppose we have no choice but to inform the manager of our predicament. I don't think they will have us arrested, though."*

"But don't people in our position usually wash dishes in the kitchen when something like this happens in order to earn their meal ... you know; like in the movies?" I asked. Desperate times call for desperate measures, and kitchen-duty was the only noble idea I have had in a long time.

"What?" GerritV. was irate. "*For kingklip? Do you realise how many dishes we'll have to wash for kingklip?"*

"But haven't you dropped the wallet by accident somewhere right here in the shop?" I insisted.

My friend had clearly not thought of that possibility, and he started scrubbing below the table like a chicken at nest, but no luck. Then it dawned on us that we had, since we arrived, switched tables for some reason that I had all but forgotten by now, and that, maybe, the wallet was lying on the floor beneath the previous table where we had been. We looked up and glanced at the table we had been seated before ... O no! Somebody else was already sitting there! What now?

So GerritV. got up, and, with the proverbial 'hat in hand' walked over to the man sitting at the table and asked for permission to search for his lost wallet below the table. The man, blushing profusely and puzzled, eventually consented with a grateful GerritV. falling on his knees and combing the floor below for lost wallets or anything even remotely resembling it.

Again: No luck. The wallet was truly gone; it had disappeared into thin air, as if into the restaurant 'Bermuda Triangle'. The time had now arrived for me to grab the bull by the horns and go and inform the manageress, an attractive and articulate (middle-aged) Greek lady, clearly very capably in charge of the family business of the restaurant. I, visibly flustered and embarrassed, proceeded to explain the situation to her as politely as I could; while at the same time offering to mail her a cheque as soon as we had arrived back home in Carletonville.

Surprisingly, she was not angry at all, and accepted my apology with the grace and poise of a real professional:

"Don't worry ... it can happen to anybody! Please don't worry, and don't bother with a cheque."

I was shocked but thanked her profusely anyway. The following day I anyway still mailed her the cheque (the full R7.50 x 2 for a total of R15.00, I guess about US$2 at the time). A man has his pride. This was during the 1970s.

Next on the agenda was to pick up a big roll, about 50 metres or so, of dress material (for our shop in Carletonville) in the old suburb of Jeppe, a few blocks more east of the CBD (Central Business District) of Johannesburg. As a child my dad had gone to school in Jeppe during the days (1930s) when the patrons in movie-theatres still have had to stand, at the end of the movie, at attention and sing 'God Save The Queen' before vacating their seats.

Those were hard times, the era of the collapse of the 1929 Wall Street crash and the great worldwide depression with the so-called 'Afrikaner poor-white predicament', i.e., the poverty also exacerbated by the mass emigration of whites from rural areas to the Witwatersrand in search for work in the rich gold mines in and around Johannesburg that comprised such labour hotspots as the East Rand and the West Rand where the violent 'Rand Rebellion' had broken out just a few years before in 1922.

We started toward that firm (I can't recall the name), comprising quite a challenging number of blocks, in a brisk 'power-walk' and completing the distance in what must have been a record time. Bear in mind that we have in the meantime resorted to a race against the clock to get our car released in time at the Carlton Centre car park due to the lost wallet and a shortage of cash. At the textiles firm we picked up huge roll of material (a hefty roll of black dress material) and started back toward the parking-garage where we had left the car earlier that morning with me leading the way and GerritV. following my lead with both balancing heavy roll of textiles on our shoulders.

It was a big, bulky roll, not necessarily extremely or unreasonably heavy but pretty awkward to carry, so we had to perform all kinds of acrobatics to stay afloat and not lose our balance (or the material) while at the same time making sure that we were not being run over by traffic each time we crossed a street or an intersection, bearing in mind that as both of us were very thin and scrawny at the time, we had a field day maintaining our balance and composure to avoid crashing into the other pedestrians or the traffic.

At the Carlton Centre, where the car was parked, we literally stormed down the steps to the basement mall where the shops and the lift (escalator), that was to take us up to the parking garage, were situated. At this juncture my friend was by now, in desperation, already walking in front, and upon spotting the lift with doors standing ajar, jumped out of his starters like an Olympic athlete and went for the doors of the lift, with the roll of material still precariously balanced on his shoulder.

The distance to the lift was much too far, about twenty-five metres, but had I cooperated, we probably would have made it in time. However, suddenly realising that we had had no idea on which floor the car was parked, I had in the meantime stopped dead in my tracks, still clutching my end of the roll of material. So there my friend went, beginning to unroll, from his end of the material, several metres (before he was mercifully stopped) of the available 50 metres of cloth about 154 cm. wide over the floor in the general direction of the lift as far as he was going, because I was still holding on to the other end of the roll.

GerritV. jumped into the lift with great fanfare, turned around, saw me still standing on the edge of the steps, and quickly jumped out again, just standing there, fuming. The bystanders and patrons of the adjacent 'open air' cafes were staring incredulously at us, probably wondering

which (and what kind of) celebrity or member of African royalty was going to wander down that 'black carpet treatment' toward the lift.

Lighting flashed and thunder rolled, and after the usual heated fallout and energetic exchange of opinions about the other, we decided, for want of better 'intelligence', to settle for the 6th floor of the parking garage for starters. Who knows, once we were there our memories would be jolted so much so that we remembered where the car was parked.

My friend all the time had entertained a hunch that the car was parked on the 6th floor and, as the environment was beginning to look strangely familiar, I was beginning to concur. The problem was ... exactly where was the car? It was a humongous parking garage, and another complication was that our time was running out in terms of the available cash reserves in my pocket. When we had first arrived in Johannesburg that morning, we did not have an inkling of all the trouble we were going to experience and the subsequent delays it eventually would involve. Then GerritV. (The guy who had lost his wallet, mind you!) got another of his brilliant ideas:

"Maybe we should split up ... You go to that end of the garage, and I will go to this end, then we ought to find the car twice as fast as we would have had we searched together as a team."

As there was logic to the madness, I followed suite ... I was tired of arguing. The good news was that my friend discovered the car not long afterwards, hiding behind some obscure pillar in some remote spot on the 6th floor. The bad news was that at that moment I was searching for the car at the other end of the garage, also on the 6th floor. How was I to know that he had found the car where it was parked? And how was GerritV. going to inform me? As it were by now, he didn't know where I was, and I didn't know where he was (Bear in mind that there were no cellphones in those days). So, my friend started yelling all over the place, upsetting just about everybody except perhaps for our Prime Minister in the Union Buildings in Pretoria:

"*Piet, where are you? Listen I have found the car! Hey, Piet ... answer me!"* And so, he went on, ad nauseam.

I eventually stumbled onto him where he was still yelling my name like a city newspaper-boy on the streets. When we finally left that parking-garage that day, I had left in my pocket the immense fortune of six lousy cents. That was the entire measure of our combined wealth at 4 pm. on that fateful day ... six lousy cents, about half-a-dime in the US.

So, out we went, exiting the Carlton Centre's parking garage in a haste and on we went down Commissioner Street, the gateway to the golden west. As soon as we had settled down and we were comfortably on our way home, my friend suddenly sat up and asked:

"Will you do me favour ... will you stop at the first opportunity and buy me a newspaper with those six cents still left in your pocket?"

"Yes, why not?" I replied (i.e., rhetorically, a little annoyed, and not in the form of a question); after all, the price for the morning newspaper ('BEELD') was exactly 6 cents ... no skin off my back.

I stopped at the first intersection where a little newspaper-boy was selling the (Afrikaans} newspaper the 'Beeld' next to the road, but my friend lost his opportunity as the traffic light had turned green and hooting motorists had forced us to take off without a paper.

Further along on our way home, that is, on 'Main Reef' road and in the region of Roodepoort, we eventually arrived at a red traffic light where a little newspaper boy again was peddling his noxious wares but, alas, as soon as he had seen the pathetic bundle of small change (six lousy little cents) in my hand, he said: *"Sorry sir, but the price has gone up ... from today the price for the Beeld is seven cents."*

References

1. Britannica.com. *Rand Revolt.* Online 2022.
2. Britannica.com. *World War 2.* Online 2022.
3. CinemaTreasures.org. *His Majesty's Theatre.* Online 2022.
4. Dnb.com. *Transvaal Rubber Company*. Online 2022.
5. History.com. *Bermuda Triangle.* Online 2022.
6. SAHistory.org.za. *Rand Rebellion 1922*. Online 2022.
7. Wikipedia. *Beeld (Afrikaans/Newspaper).* Online 2022.
8. Wikipedia. *East Rand.* Online 2022.
9. Wikipedia. *Fulton J. Sheen.* Online 2022.
10. Wikipedia. *Kingklip.* Online 2022.
11. Wikipedia. *Liberace.* Online 2022.
12. Wikipedia. *Paris.* Online 2022.
13. Wikipedia. *Roodepoort.* Online 2022.
14. Wikipedia. *The Out-of-Towners (1970 film).* Online 2022.
15. Wikipedia. *Union Buildings*. Online 2022.
16. Wikipedia. *Village Main, Gauteng*. Online 2022
17. Wikipedia. *Wall Street Crash (1929).* Online 2022.
18. Wrdm.gov.za. *West Rand District Municipality.* Online 2022.

21

Meet the Champs

All you need in this life is ignorance and confidence, and then success is sure.
[Mark Twain, 1835-1910]

This is another of those stories that involved my enigmatic friend, GerritV., the much-celebrated hero from '*The Calamity Clowns'*. This is what happened:

It was about thirty-eight to forty years after the first time we had first tried our hands at the sport (or is it a parlour game?) of 'ten pin bowling' as two skinny youngsters in Vanderbijlpark (Vaal Triangle) that we finally arranged for a new rendezvous in a neighbouring town (Witbank) where GerritV. has been residing for many years.

I was to present a two-day workshop at one of the big parastatals in Witbank on behalf of my company that specialised in Occupational Health & Safety training. So, after I had registered for my stay at the guesthouse, we drove out to the new mall on the outskirts of the city.

GerritV., a 'serial sports-enthusiast', had challenged me to a dual of 'ten pin bowling' at the mall, not that the game was the focus; it simply was to serve as an aid to conversation, reminiscences over the world we had left behind and, of course, the '*pièce de résistance'*, ... an excuse for dinner at the mall. This time, however, we were properly prepared except for ending up arguing over the privilege to pay for the meals.

Bear in mind that by now we had survived such socio-cultural ravages as national conscription, the hippie-era and the Elvis and Beatle mania of the sixties; our country's democratization of the nineties and the Y2k-scare of the year 2000, so how could a 'ten pin bowling' dual ever have scared us now?

We pitched early in the evening and started off on a 'good foot', (pardon the pun) with both of us scoring not too badly but with me fortunately winning all two or three sets over the course of the early evening. As an amateur I did not bowl too shabbily whenever I played, which did not happen often, so I was not a little impressed with myself.

We then dispersed for dinner at the local Spur, where we reminisced for hours on days gone by, and, when we finished, went strolling up and down inside the mall, just relaxing and chatting, which almost felt like a local remake of the 'The Odd Couple', if it weren't for the cameras that were missing. I must add (as an afterthought) that, the next day, GerritV. went on to win at miniature golf ('putt-putt' ... I am hopeless at miniature golf) so he eventually did have his sweet revenge, for by then we were even, both 'one up'.

However, after the bowling game and dinner of the night before we had eventually left for home, with GerritV. departing for his house and me departing for the guesthouse where I was billeted, compliments of my firm. That was when the drama started.

It was about 11pm. when I opened the door of my car and had set my right foot on the ground in the process of getting out (In South Africa cars are right-hand drive and motorists adhere to the left side of the road) that I looked down and saw the two ugly critters on my feet: A pair of garish bowling-alley shoes, two-tone and numbered as *Pair Number 74*, with the digit '7' written (big) with an indelible black marker on the heel of the left-foot shoe and the digit '4' (big) on the right-foot shoe. One could see my number ('74') from the proverbial miles away. That was the good news ... the bad news was that our own shoes were still at the bowling-alley.

My blood then suddenly ran cold as I realised that (i) the bowling-alley was probably long since closed by 11pm., (ii) my own (decent) shoes were still on the shelf in the rack at the bowling-alley, and (iii) I had to pitch at the boardroom of the big corporate enterprise (parastatal) for that

workshop as early as 7am. in preparation for the class at 8am. the next morning. There simply was no way in which I was going to pitch in my own shoes ... the die was cast.

As it was only a two-day workshop, I had not bothered to bring a second pair of shoes or an elaborate reserve wardrobe. We peripatetic trainers are inclined to travel frugally, very frugally. I then phoned my friend, for it must have been about twenty minutes since we've parted ways from his home where my car earlier stood parked.

"Have you seen what I had seen?" I asked.

"Yup ... I have seen it!" he replied.

"What's your number?" I asked.

"Eighty-Two", he replied (There followed an uncomfortable pause).

"What's yours?" he asked.

"Seventy-four", I replied.

"So, what now?" he asked.

"Well, I'll be needing my shoes in the morning ... is there any way in which I can have my shoes by tomorrow before 8am?" I asked.

"Nope, but you can always borrow my shoes!" he replied. I hesitated. *"Okay, I'll tell you what ... I'll go the bowling-alley at 9am. when they open, pick up your shoes and bring the shoes to you in person between 9am. and 10am. All you will have to do is furnish me with the address of the firm and the number of the floor, as well as the number or name of boardroom where you'll be engaged in the training,"* he said.

"That's just brilliant." I replied. *"They will never give you my shoes until they had received their shoes from me intact. They're not stupid."*

"Ouch ... I never thought of that; but I can always drive to the boardroom and fetch their bowling-shoes first and then bring your shoes for you on my way back home," he said.

"Yeah right ... and leave me here where I must walk around on my socks all morning until you pitch one day with my shoes!" I replied.

He was growing exasperated. *"What if I were to pick you up at lunchtime (about 1 p.m.) and drive you over to the mall, exchange the shoes and return you to the boardroom as quickly as possible ... could that work?"*

"Technically it could work," I said, *"but you have forgotten one vital thing."* I replied.

"What's that?" he asked.

"I start work at 8am. Roundabout 1pm. we will disperse for lunch. At about 2pm. we will continue with our workshop activities. If I could survive until 1pm. wearing these ridiculous

bowling-shoes, I might as just well hang in there until 4pm. when I dismiss the class for the day. Why bother to fetch the shoes at all?"

So, that was how it so happened that I had to present a boardroom workshop to the ambitious young graduates of that giant, national parastatal ... dressed in an expensive, executive sports-coat, stylish brown pants and a pair of ugly (two-tone) and garish blue-and-red bowling-shoes marked on the heels in large, garish figures in numbers, i.e., '7' (left foot) and '4' (right foot).

References

1. Britannica.com. *Elvis Presley.* Online 2022.
2. Britannica.com. *Hippie.* Online 2022.
3. Britannica.com. *Mark Twain.* Online 2022.
4. Labour.gov.za. *The Profile of Occupational Health and Safety in South Africa.* Online 2022.
5. Safeopedia.com. *What is Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)?* Online 2022.
6. SAHistory.org.za. *Witbank, Mpumalanga.* Online 2022.
7. SpurSteakRanches.com. *Spur Family Restaurant.* Online 2022.
8. Wikipedia. *Miniature Golf ('Putt-Putt').* Online 2022.
9. Wikipedia. *Ten-Pin Bowling.* Online 2022.
10. Wikipedia. *The Beatles.* Online 2022.
11. Wikipedia. *The Odd Couple (1968 Film).* Online 2022.
12. Wikipedia. *Year 2000 Problem (Y2K).* Online 2022.
13. Wiktionary. *Pièce de résistance.* Online 2022.

22

The Groggy Trooper

Ordinarily he was insane, but he had lucid moments when he was merely stupid
[Heinrich Heine, 1797-1856]

This story, perhaps true, perhaps only an urban legend (or both) was told to me by an uncle of mine during the 1970s when I was still unmarried and living in Vanderbijlpark.

Bear in mind that my wife and I got married in 1978 when she was 18 years old and I an 'astronomical' twelve years older at 30. People often wonder why the big age-difference between the two of us, and, if it sticks to wondering, I won't interfere. But when they insist, I usually reply:

> *"Well, in the first place, I was born long before her (in 1947), so it stands to reason that I would be found to be older than she, who was born in 1959. Secondly, I never got married earlier because I feared the bad girls and the good girls probably feared me ... it was Catch-22."*

Jokes aside; history will prove that, as written from the 1960s in my dilapidated old diary, that I had, long ago, prayed for a wife (and a good wife to boot) to be 'sent' to me when I reached the age of 30. So, we were married in January of 1978, 2 months and 3 weeks after my thirtieth birthday.

During the period 1974 and 1977, or thereabouts, my uncle GullusG. was engaged in earth-removal and the building of bridges and roads for the Blackwood & Hodge Co. somewhere in the Orange Free State and Northern Cape. Sadly, however, this uncle was murdered in cold blood, not many years later, by two thugs who were trying to steal his vehicle, a light delivery van (LDV) out of his garage. So, here he was, sharing the epic story which had thrilled people so many times around so many a lonely campfire late at night, far away from hearth and home.

What happened was that my uncle was working a contract for the army, who from time to time was hard-pressed to make use of the services of private civil contractors when army-operatives of that kind were not conveniently available. During the day he used to go out and with his colleagues and work the project to the best of their ability, and in the late afternoon again return to the army barracks where his hosts had arranged for accommodation for the forlorn crew of workers far from home and loved ones with him sharing a room with a squad of rookie soldiers in the same barracks, although his bedroom was one of two small, separate cubicles normally reserved for the drill-instructors. The story was told by him as the truth, although it is not entirely impossible that it was a favourite urban legend regurgitated by troops for its popularity.

On weekends, those soldiers who had received weekend passes, usually went out to visit friends or family and then, when the weekend was over, returned to barracks on Sunday-evenings at curfew time, say at 12pm or so. Apparently, there was this one individual, however, with the outrageous habit of returning to barracks from weekend-pass Sunday night, way past curfew time, heavily inebriated, i.e., as drunk as the proverbial lord.

As I, for the sake of my respected reader, wish to convey the chronicle to the reader in the most tasteful possible way, I am sort of morally compelled now to use language much more 'genteel' and less picturesque than what a less sensitive but more illustrious and colourful raconteur perhaps would have done, and at the same time probably would have gotten away with in 'less genteel' company.

When this inebriated soldier (Let's call him 'Chappy' for the purpose of this story) late at night or in the early hours of the morning then arrived at camp, most of the troops would already be

in bed, sleeping. Chappy would then undress at leisure, and, eventually, drop down dead-beat on his bunk as good as spent, from where he would snore away as if the lives of the entire squad depended on it.

If this had been all there was to the problem the squad had with Chappy, it probably would have been the least of the squad's worries. The problem was that, in the wee hours of the morning, Chappy would suddenly rise from his bed like a fiend from a grotto and develop a violent case of 'vomitus' (to put it mildly) all over the barracks 'precinct' without regard for the life and limb (or peace of mind) of his outraged buddies in the barracks. Afterwards, his mates would collude to bring him to rest and put him back to bed with some evil-smelling concoction, partly to pacify him down but mainly to shock the drunken daylights out of him.

"Come on, Chappy, my mate," they would complain, *"Why do you come here and get sick all over the barracks. You've had all the time in the world to get sick at home, or some pub in town. Why here, of all places?"*

"Sorry guys, I won't do it again ... promise!"

"That's what you say every Monday morning, Chappy!"

"Cross my heart and hope to die!"

"We'll see!"

Come Sunday the story would repeat itself every time ... nothing will have changed.

"Come on Chappy ... you promised! One more time and we are going to report you!"

"But what can I do?" he objected. *"I don't do it on purpose, you know!"*

"Chappy, we have an idea ... when you ever feel nausea coming on, why don't you simply stick your head through the window and get sick on the patio outside instead?" they pleaded.

"Not a bad idea!" he said. *"I'll try and remember that."*

The next weekend, he got sick again but despite the good advice, nevertheless still forgot to stick his head through the window as promised. The squad has reached the end of its tether. Fortunately, every crisis produces its hero; one must just be prepared to wait for it long enough. So, it was then, in the hour of crisis, that one bloke came up with a bright idea:

"Guys, this weekend we must be prepared, and I have an idea. When Chappy arrives back from weekend-pass, we wait until he is fast asleep; then we all get up and carry Chappy with his bunk outside onto the patio and let him sleep there for the night; he probably won't notice a thing and, as plastered as he usually is, will not be the any worse for it in the morning. In the event of him getting sick again, he will then jump up as usual and do his thing on the patio instead... what do you say?"

The motion was received unanimously, and the following weekend the entire squad of conspirators waited in anticipation in their beds for Chappy to return from weekend-pass. They were determined not to ever again suffer the same fate that they've been suffering for the past few weeks; enough was enough.

So Chappy came in, late and in the wee hours of the morning (as usual), bombed to oblivion, and just dropped down on his bed without even bothering to change.

"Quick! Quick!" whispered the leader, and the squad quietly assembled to carry Chappy, now *non compos mentis* on his bed, out onto the barracks-patio.

"Shhh ...! Quickly ... back to bed!"

Nobody should be blamed for what happened next. It just must have been one of those strange coincidences of life in terms of that, *"If anything can go wrong it will!"* moments by the legendary 'Murphy'. In retrospect:

- Was it a good idea that something had to be done about Chappy's drinking habits? [Yes!].

- Was it a bad idea for Chappy to come home on Sunday-evenings drunk and heavily under the influence? [Yes!].

- Was it a good idea for the squad to carry Chappy out onto the patio after he had passed out on his bed, as drunk as a lord? [Yes!].

- Was it a better option for Chappy to get sick, if he indeed were to get sick at all, on the patio outside instead of inside on the floor of the barracks? [Yes!].

There was, as the reader can clearly see, absolute consensus about the stratagem that was followed ... of that there should never be the slightest doubt. What was not a good idea was for Chappy, when he again woke up in the wee hours of the morning, completely oblivious of his improved 'geopolitical' status outside on the patio, to this time have miraculously remembered to, as so earnestly requested earlier and all month long, make sure he stuck his head through the window out of consideration for his exasperated pals.

References

1. Bloomberg.com. *Blackwood Hodge South Africa Pty Ltd.* Online 2022.
2. Britannica.com. *Heinrich Heine.* Online 2022.
3. Britannica.com. *Northern Cape.* Online 2022.
4. Merriam-Webster. *Strategem/Definition & Meaning.* Online 2022.
5. Wikipedia. *Cath-22 (Logic).* Online 2022.
6. Wikipedia. *Murphy's Law.* Online 2022.
7. Wikipedia. *Orange Free State.* Online 2022.

23

My Frenemy the Mouse

Beware the fury of a patient man.
[John Dryden, 1631-1700]

I have spent a great chunk of my life in the retail sector, e.g., as a general dealer, selling textiles, gents and ladies wear, etc., most of it together and in unison with my father, my sister and two of my brothers. I have been working in my father's large shop in Carletonville ever since I was fifteen years old in 1963, part time first but full time since 1967. My first pay (for helping on Saturday mornings) was R2 per Saturday for about 5-6 hours' work.

One particularly piece of nostalgia from the era was the song, *Elizabeth Serenade* by the Günther Kallman Choir that used to play over the air in the car so often during its heyday, while we commuted between our home in Randgate to our first shop ever in Carletonville in 1963. The world then was spritely and alive with post-war enthusiasm: For instance, Gary Player was winning tournaments all over America and the world; songs that 'hit' the hit-parade at the time were pieces like *Love Is Blue, Wednesday's Child* and *Games That Lovers Play,* etc. I am still reeling today after that charming little piece called *Summer Wind* by Roger Williams ... sadly I was to only hear it again (thanks to the Internet) until the year 2020, fifty-seven years later.

My father eventually, during the early 1970s, moved the main base of his operations to the bustling industrial megalopolis of the Vaal Triangle, and specifically, the town of Vanderbijlpark. In those days my father used to be a very industrious and robust retailer, and he must have had dozens of shops all over our region. His main start-up capital and regular funding (when needed) came from wealthy Indian families and business tycoons in and around Johannesburg, and he had been enjoying a particularly good business relationship with his friend (and often, only helpful financier) in the Indian community, a very successful Indian businessman and a modest tycoon in his own right, Mr. A.I. Laher (affectionately known as 'Long-One') as alluded to earlier.

It so happened that I, many years later, one day also opened a little shop selling such merchandise as mattresses, synthetic foam etc. in a suburb of Pretoria called 'Sinoville'. This shop was conveniently situated in a diminutive, albeit fashionable little mall not far from our home, so much so that I could daily perambulate on foot between the house and the shop.

One day when the mattress factory in Rosslyn, a huge industrial area not far from my shop, was delivering mattresses in my area, they arrived a little late in the afternoon and I then arranged with them to come and drop off their cargo just before I closed shop for the day ... there was no sense in sending them back and waste everybody's time and money (including mine) in the process.

So, we proceeded to offload dozens and dozens of mattresses of all kinds and sizes and, as soon we were finished, I thanked my service provider profusely, locked up and went home. Behind me the mattresses lay stacked in blocks of about two metres high all over the floor of a great part of the premises, but no worries ... tomorrow was another day.

The first thing I did the next morning was to start creating order in my shop. There were mattresses everywhere, and all shopkeepers know ... nothing kills shopping and sales like an untidy, cluttered shopfloor. I have spent many years working in shops together with my father from as early as 1963 to 1978 when I bid him finally adieu and decided to break away to something different. In other words, I had grown up in the retail world of the general dealer, including textiles, gents' and ladies' outfitters, dress fabrics as well as curtaining, haberdashery etc. and since early childhood we, as kids, were exposed to the magic of the store, first my uncle's little rural grocery store and later my father's series of 'general dealer' shops.

In my father's shop the admixture of language (Hindi, Tamil, Gujarati) all used to sound like Sanskrit to my narrow, unsophisticated Afrikaans (and English) ears. I never could learn those complex languages because of the strange and foreign written alphabets, although there was a famous clergyman in the neighbouring town of Krugersdorp, by the name of Justus Du Plessis, who had hailed from a prolific family of preachers and missionaries who reportedly, among others, spoke Gujarati fluently, thanks to long years of missionary outreaches in rural India.

His eldest brother, David Du Plessis, who was living in Oakland, California, was fast becoming internationally acclaimed as *Mr. Pentecost,* once described at the time by 'Time Magazine' as one of the nine most prolific spiritual leaders in North America.

Be that as it may, the Indian shops in our village and in shops all over Johannesburg used to ooze incense ... very aromatic, oriental and to us, strange. The Indian businessmen (and women, mind you) were, although foreign to us in dress, religion and way of life, always civil and courteous and kind in demeanour to us as kids and potential patrons. On Fridays the little Indian boys were all 'festooned' in immaculate white shirts, matching bowties and the smartest little three-piece of boys' suits, for weekly Mosque. I have, over the years, never lost my fascination for the Indian culture and heritage, especially classical Indian architecture.

Down in the suburb of Richmond, not far from my grandparents' house in Cottesloe, was a little Chinese fast-foods joint with the name *Atande Bantu*, a place that concentrated on supplying convenience food more congruent with the traditional African palate, for the many African labourers employed by businesses or working in industries, such as the huge gasworks, in the area. By the way, since my grandparents used to live nearby in the suburb of Cottesloe, they could haul gas (in liquidised form) away in buckets for free at the gasworks.

Once, about 1957, my grandmother asked me to accompany my friend, RodneyE., the neighbour's boy, down to the Chinese shop just across Kingsway and entreat him for some 'empty boxes', probably to help somebody load some private belongings onto a goods-train or something. My friend RodneyE., whose father was a press-photographer for the *Johannesburg Star*, was a boy about my age, and he had decided to drag me along for companionship. We were good friends as he had earlier introduced me to the fascinating world of semi-precious stones which his father was fond of polishing on site at home, as well as to the mesmerising beauty of the planets through his father's enormous custom-built telescope ... through those lenses and at night the planet Venus sparkled like the proverbial 'diamond in the sky'.

Upon arrival, the old Chinese shopkeeper, a true gentleman from the 'Old School', courteously listened to RodneyE.'s request, nodded understandingly and then hobbled patiently into the store at the back of his shop in search of some 'empty boxes'. There he fiddled for some time which must have felt like weeks, while we were waiting impatiently in front, admiring the wide variety of outlandish dishes on display in the glass counter of the shop. Then, at last, he would emerge, looking dishevelled and exhausted, while throwing his hands up into the air:

"Sorry ... tell mommy all empty boxes full!"

To return to my epic acquaintance with my *frenemy* (hybrid word: enemy + friend) the mouse happened as follows:

When I eventually had lifted the last mattress from the floor and shoved it into place on the shelves or into the upright-racks, I turned around ... and what did I see? A teeny-weeny little mouse, lying prostrate on his side, his arms and legs outstretched above and below him ... and as flat as the proverbial pancake like a surfer on his back at the beach. The little beast must have been caught off-guard underneath the avalanche of mattresses during its dumping the night before, and probably had been lying there for dead all through the night. Maybe it was imported by the truck from the factory.

What a cruel, inhumane way to go! I thought. *Being crushed beneath all that deadweight for twelve hours, unable to breathe, smothered and suffocating until the last troy ounce of oxygen had left its little lungs ... and nobody to phone!*

I began prodding the lifeless little carcass in the hope of eliciting some signs of life or invoking some semblance of response ... but to no avail. The mouse was as dead as a dodo. My heart really went out to the little critter ... how could anyone in his right mind hate such an innocent-looking little creature, and why in the world were women so scared of them? Why, just look at him, so small, vulnerable, defenceless, chaste ... I mean, does it look as if that little face could ever tell a lie, or that pretty little pink tongue will ever utter a harsh word toward its neighbour?

Why this mad dash to kill mice and get rid of the 'pests' ... have we gone completely bonkers? Have people never seen the movie *Stuart Little* ... where have they been all the time? And, to think that I was part of this diabolical worldwide conspiracy to exterminate that noble species! What were we all thinking!?

I was just turning and starting toward the kitchen to fetch a scoop with which to pick up the disgusting cadaver and 'zap it into the zibi', when I heard a deep sigh from the innermost recesses of that little dead mouse's lungs.

"Aaaahhh ... !" said the mouse, sucking the welcome air deep into his poor little oxygen-deprived lungs. Then he sat up while looking around, a little befuddled and bemused, and, suddenly, jumped up and started to run around the shop like crazy.

"Hey you!" I exclaimed. *"A minute ago, you were dead and now you're running around like you owned the shop!"* I said and grabbed my only broom in self-defence ... one could never be too sure. "*Come here, you little rascal ... where do you think you're going?"*

I chased him this and that way all the way from the front door to the back door; and from the 'port side' to the 'starboard side' ... no matter how hard I tried, there was no catching the darn mouse; there must have been dozens and dozens of mattresses for the mouse to hide under and between. I now suddenly was resolute in catching the scoundrel for there was no way in which a mouse with a brain the size of a pea was going to beat me in a battle of wits. But, however, in the end, beat me he did ... I never saw him again.

If the reader should, one day, care to send his grandchildren on an expedition to the little shop where I had lost my 'frenemy' the mouse, they would probably see the mysterious spectre of an exasperated shopkeeper still chasing the ghost of a long-lost mouse, just like in the legend of the ghost of 'Flying Dutchman' around the Cape of Storms at Table Bay.

References

1. Britannica.com. *Flying Dutchman/Legendary Ship.* Online 2022.
2. Britannica.com. *Krugersdorp.* Online 2022.
3. Britannica.com. *Table Bay.* Online 2022.
4. Britannica.com. *Time Magazine.* 2022.
5. DigitalShowcase/Oral Roberts University. *1987 Congress*
6. Journals.co.za. *Zap it in a Zibi.* Online 2022.
   on the Holy Spirit (Justus du Plessis). Online 2022.
7. Second.wiki. *Günter Kallman.* Online 2022.
8. Shazam.com. *Elisabeth Serenade (Song).* Online 2022.
9. Wikipedia. *Architecture of India.* Online 2022.
10. Wikipedia. *Carletonville.* 2022.
11. Wikipedia. *Chinese Language.* Online 2022.
12. Wikipedia. *Cottesloe, Johannesburg.* Online 2022.
13. Wikipedia. *David du Plessis ('Mr. Pentecost').* Online 2022.
14. Wikipedia. *Gary Player.* Online 2022.
15. Wikipedia. *John Dryden, 1631-1700.* Online 2022.
16. Wikipedia. *Kingsway Campus Auckland Park.* Online 2022.

17. Wikipedia. *List of African Dishes.* Online 2022.
18. Wikipedia. *Mosque.* Online 2022.
19. Wikipedia. *North America.* Online 2022.
20. Wikipedia. *Oakland, California.* Online 2022.
21. Wikipedia. *Richmond, Johannesburg.* Online 2022.
22. Wikipedia. *Roger Williams (Pianist).* Online 2022.
23. Wikipedia. *Rosslyn, Gauteng.* Online 2022.
24. Wikipedia. *Sinoville, Pretoria.* Online 2022.
25. Wikipedia. *Stuart Little (film).* Online 2022.
26. Wikipedia. *The Star (South Africa).* Online 2022.
27. Wikipedia. *Vaal Triangle.* Online 2022.

24

Gardening and Garbage

What a man needs in gardening is a cast-iron back, with a hinge in it.
[Charles D. Warner, 1829-1900].

In the backyard of the rented house where we lived in Sinoville during the late 1990s and early 2000s, i.e., a suburb of Pretoria north of the 'Magaliesberg', was a strange object of a nuisance that used to drift here and there all over the yard, just getting in the way of everybody generally. As it was my job to mow the lawn and keep the premises tidy, this object was a constant source of irritation and frustration for me all the time, especially in the beginning when I was trying to mow the lawn.

This obnoxious object had this annoying habit of popping up uninvited in front of the lawnmower, upon which the 'lawn-mowee' (the hapless 'operator' being pulled along by the lawnmower) then has had to either quickly swerve to avoid a collision with this object and probable injury to his person, or damage to the lawnmower (or even both), or stop, allow the mower to idle and first move the offensive object out of the way.

Upon the return trip the object would then, inexplicably, be found by the lawn-mowee to, mysteriously, suddenly have jumped into the way of the lawnmower once again. This dire situation had been carrying on for months when I, one day, exasperated and sick and tired of this object, took it by the scruff of its neck and lobbed it onto the compost heap in the corner of our yard.

"*There!*" I said. *That ought to do it!*"

That was the end of our problem, I thought ... but not for long. Some misguided do-gooders would just later mysteriously arrive and put the object back onto the general surface of that operational part of the lawn where it would just once more, a week later, get in the lawn-mowee's way again. The object of my vexation was simply incorrigible, i.e., the surviving remnant of a large patio-umbrella that apparently had long since become extinct, and the 'remnant' I am referring to be the round, bottom-part of that patio-umbrella comprising the heavy iron, probably with a cast-iron base, attached to a stem about 75 cm long that had broken off from the main body of the now long-extinct umbrella. This object was quite heavy and used to be the source of considerable annoyance whenever it had to be relocated or shifted.

One day I decided to throw it out with the garbage and the rest of the garden refuse ... but to no avail. The council-employees, highly agitated, simply picked it up and placed it back onto our driveway, indicating to us that the refuse-removal truck was not allowed to remove 'scrap-iron' from residents' homes ... only garden refuse. It was so obvious that I in truth should have known better, but the reason I had tried that avenue anyway is that, sometimes, some of the council-employees would welcome such scrap-iron as they often would sell it to scrap-iron dealers for cash or exchange it for tobacco and cigarettes.

So, there you have it ... even the council employees did not want the wretched thing, notwithstanding the fact that I was doing them a favour by donating my wealth of scrap-iron to potential entrepreneurs in the informal sector of the market eagerly scrounging for scrap-iron to sell; that was how I had reasoned at the time anyway.

Well, back to the drawing board: Either I had to go and dump it myself on the designated city waste-disposal site in our area, or simply try and get rid of it by putting it in storage on our premises until someone, like a friend or family member etc., kindly removed it for some

eccentric personal use. How anyone in his right mind could let an obnoxious piece of junk like that lie around his yard I would never understand. What has the stupid (previous) tenant been thinking?

So, we tolerated the object indefinitely, until one day when I finally decided to have a go at the refuse removal truck again. I have in the meantime observed that there were several new employees on board and maybe, just maybe, one of them would be interested in selling the scrap-iron for cash. So, I sat back and waited for the truck to come around again later that week.

Without me at first really noticing it, another source of irritation had, however, in the meantime simultaneously 'evolved' ... the huge, black (council format) plastic refuse-bin. This refuse-bin, a large contraption of durable construction with small wheels at the base for mobility so in vogue with city councils today, was beginning to run full and we have lately been having a hard time compressing the garbage inside to make it all fit into the refuse-bin for the next round of garbage refuse-removal that week.

As we were still new in the neighbourhood, we were not really acquainted with or prepared for the pitfalls, snares and hazards normally associated with the urban challenges involved with living in big cities (Remember *'The Out of Towners*?'). By the end of the week the refuse-bin had grown very full, and we were growing fidgety about the situation.

Unfortunately, I must have dropped my vigilance and, when the refuse-removal truck at last came around that week, it only picked up the refuse that had been waiting around in plastic bags as leftovers from the previous week, as I had completely forgotten to haul out the refuse-bin onto our pavement (sidewalk) in time for them to empty. Fortunately, one of the new council-guys must at last have taken a liking to the piece of scrap-iron still lying indolently around the garbage area and so had snatched it up to sell it for cash ... and what a relief that the bait was now taken at last!

The problem was that, because I had neglected to put out the large refuse-bin in time, it was now almost beginning to spill over, and it would be another week before the refuse-truck would be coming round again. What now? We immediately called a board-meeting with top management, i.e., comprising my wife and me.

"I suggest that we try and compress the garbage by pressing on it with all our strength and then hope that it will compress enough for us to dump more garbage in there during the week ahead without it spilling out too much in the process," I suggested.

"With what ... with our bare hands?" my wife inquired.

"Don't be daft; let's get a big stick or some kind of spatula or something. Actually, any heavy object ought to do."

So, we then went and collected ourselves a small variety of implements and contrivances, whether legal or illegal, ethical or unethical, with which to bludgeon the unsavoury contents of the refuse-bin with. Now isn't it odd how manual labour is inclined to inspire things we would never normally enthusiastically do ... things like meditation, introspection and philosophising? So, after we had been making very little progress for a few minutes or so, I began to think out loud to my wife:

"You know what? After ten minutes of manual labour focusing on a purposeful goal, I now realise that nothing beats a good dose of vigorous exercise and getting out of breath like this occasionally. But I have also discovered that the ideal implement with which to press this garbage deeper down into the bin probably would have been something that was heavy, with a solid round base and an elongated stem to grip it by, something like ...!"

I froze in mid-sentence: I had just discovered my colossal mistake. The implement I needed, so perfectly suited and fit-for-purpose for what we had all morning been straining to do but not with much success, was probably taken away just a few minutes earlier in the refuse-removal truck. I jumped around and sprinted to the front of the house, but to no avail ... the heavy nuisance of an infuriating object was gone, never to surface again. It would appear as if the previous tenant was, it would in retrospect now seem, not so stupid after all.

References

1. Dictionary.Cambridge.org. *Philosophize.* Online 2022.
2. GardeningInSouthAfrica.co.za. *Gardening in South Africa.* Online 2022.
3. Hornbill.co.za. *Magaliesburg/The Magaliesberg Mountains.* Online 2022.
4. MayoClinic.com. *Meditation: A simple, fast way to reduce stress.* Online 2022.
5. VeryWellMind.com. *Introspection.* Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Online 2022.
6. Wikipedia. *Charles D. Warner.* Online 2022.
7. Wikipedia. *Sinoville, Pretoria.* Online 2022.
8. Wikipedia. *The Out-of-Towners (1970 film).* Online 2022.

25

The Arachnophobic Husband

No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear.
[Edmund Burke, 1729-1797].

Arachnophobia is the morbid fear of spiders, scorpions and other members of 'Arachnida' (or the 'Arachnids') in the animal kingdom, and, as I had already mentioned before, isn't it strange how (the first letters of) some of nature's ugliest creatures sometimes usually begin with an 'S', e.g., like snakes, spiders and scorpions? There even appears to be something of the infernal hiss of the fiend in the pronouncing of the name:

"*Ssspider, Ssscorpion, Sssnake ...*"

It may be prejudicial of me, but I do not like spiders (nor scorpions or snakes), which could of course be interpreted by people that I am being prejudiced and unfair to them. After all, if we could, for instance, somehow transform ourselves into spiders, say into spider-salesmen, or spider commercial-travellers, or spider triathlon-athletes, we might just find that the spiders in that community would probably have such commonplace and amiable names as *Angus, Ambrose, Friedrich, Herman, Llewellyn or Mortimer etc.*

It could of course be risky to choose one's own alias (for the excursion into Spider Valley) too early ... one ought to keep one's options open and embark on the expedition armed to the teeth with alternative aliases, as the last thing I want to see happen is to get involved in an ugly altercation with a spider over names.

So, on the issue of the morbid fear of spiders, i.e., 'Arachnophobia', to be exact. The reader must please bear in mind that in our family all the men have a morbid (and an embarrassing) fear of spiders. I have a brother (no names, no pack-drill) who calls his wife when he notices a spider stuck in the window's curtain-lace. One urban legend goes that the average person is never farther than two metres removed from the presence of a spider; it is also said that the average person will swallow about twelve spiders live (in his sleep) in an average lifetime. Others say that those are 'conspiracy theories' not to be taken seriously, but I am inclined to disagree: I once have seen a little spider about the size of a small gnat walk over the screen of my computer which confirmed those 'conspiracy theories' as totally valid. Spiders are everywhere, and some species of a spider reportedly regularly navigate through space like surfers with the aid of spider-webbing at altitudes higher even than those normally negotiated by soaring eagles.

Now it so transpired that, on this fateful day, 'being retired' and having nothing better to do, I was ironing a shirt and was just coming from the room, where I had been engaged in the ironing, that I caught sight of a hideous-looking object some distance away suspiciously reclining on the floor. It was black, about the size of a large black jellybean and sitting dead-still, as motionless as an accomplished yogi in a deep trance.

"Wow!" I thought, *"What an ugly critter!"* and deftly stepped around it in order not to disturb it in his apparent reverie, or whatever it was. And (whatever it was) I was convinced that it was not meditating upon the health benefits of jogging or the virtues of not smoking. Spiders were rare in the apartment where we were living at the time, as we do not live close to woods, parklands, or public gardens, prompting me to look quite askance at this alien intruder. My first thoughts (as I recall) at the sight of a spider usually were something in the line of the familiar, *"What the ...?"* or, "*How the ...?"* Anyway, I wondered, what to do now? Frankly, I hate killing spiders, and for good reasons too.

- *First*, many of them are athletic little creatures and have this uncanny knack to evade the human's clumsy blows with something like a rolled-up newspaper with comparative ease.

- *Second*, hitting a spider in one's house with a rolled-up newspaper anyway could mean a messy business, and it not only militates against my highly developed sense of decency, but, in addition, it also will require that I clean up the mess, i.e., the scene of the crime, afterwards.

- *Third*, they have amazing psychic powers and memories, and once you've missed, they'll probably come back later with a vengeance and lie and wait for you underneath your pillow. Don't be fooled ... they never forget a face.

- *Fourth*, it was sort of against my principles to kill something smaller than what I was. You see, I was bullied in the seventh as well as the ninth grades (which I on each occasion had successfully counter-bullied with devastating effect) and ever since had developed a distinct dislike for bigger organisms bullying smaller organisms, and I don't think it was meant to be that way.

For instance, if an adult male of about 178 000 cm^3 were to 'massacre' (for lack of a better word) a spider the size of about 1.5 cm^3 or 3 cm^3 it would mean that the spider was bludgeoned into oblivion by a creature anything between 89 000 to 118 667 times bigger than itself. That would be tantamount to King Kong trouncing such a friendly, affable and benign living organism as Woody Allen on the sidewalks of New York City in a blind rage ... and for what?

- *Fifth* ... what was fifth? O yes, I almost forgot: Spiders apparently play an indispensable role in our ecology, hence the adage: "*If you want to have fun, let the spider run.*" I wouldn't mind letting the spider run, provided it is in a general direction away from me.

There is no denying that some spiders are ominous creatures with the potential to inflict grievous bodily harm. The big game hunter, James Clarke, says in his book *Man is the Prey* (p.61) that the South African *knopiespinnekop* ('button spider') is about as toxic as the American *black widow* spider. It is also said that people bitten by this spider feel little more than a severe local pain and localized swelling.

My brother HansS. was bitten on his arm by such a spider in (about) 1957 when he was only 6 years old, and he wandered about the house with his arm swollen (like that of Popeye) to twice its normal size for weeks on end. During the middle-nineties of the last century, I was bitten in my face while I was sleeping in our house in the Bushveldt, by either a 'button spider' or a small 'wolf spider', an even smaller (but more acrobatic) spider than the button spider, and I can still show you the area on my face, where it had left its mark at the time, until today. The bite i.e., toxin, causes the skin-tissue to disintegrate which reportedly can never be replaced of its own volition without some serious medical (surgical) intervention, like a tissue-transplant, or something. James Clarke says about the 'button spider':

> "*The spider's venom is, like so many venoms, something of a mystery, but in character is not only similar to a cobra's venom but is, weight for weight, far more potent.*"
>
> [Clarke: 61].

Of the tarantula he says:

> *"The tarantula spider is absolutely harmless to man as is every other spider in the world apart from the black widow, and Australia's funnel spider which is sometimes erroneously called a tarantula."* [Clarke: 62].

I am not convinced that the bird-eating tarantula of the Amazon Forest is totally harmless to humans but for now I'll have to take Clarke's word for it ... I probably will never see such a spider in my lifetime anyway. So, back to the business at hand: I went to fetch a few pages of newspaper and a longish stick, one of those some people sometimes buy at the mall with which to scratch their backs. I then approached the spider, or whatever it was, very cautiously. Technically it could have been a shrunken crocodile or a miniature hippopotamus for all I cared, but, despite my failing eyesight and with my spectacles left behind in the kitchen, I had already decided that it was a spider, and that was that.

Step one was to drape the newspaper surreptitiously over the form of the spider, and with the stick in my hand I then advanced on the spider (now prostrate beneath the newspaper) and, bending down, delivered a magnificent barrage of blows with such a combination of skill, force and display of instinctive ferocity that would have impressed the most intrepid of big game hunters. Afterwards I stood up and disappeared to the first floor of our apartment to make myself a cup of Ceylon-tea, my vice-of-choice, just like the villains in the movies who, after the assassination, would open the victim's bar-refrigerator and pour themselves a tall drink.

"What now?" I wondered. *"Who is going to clean up that ghastly mess?"* Maybe, I thought, I should wait for my wife to return the following day from Eldoraigne where she was staying over for the night; she usually had the stomach for wretched challenges like these. So, I decided to wait.

I waited the two days with much dread anticipation, all the while looking at the spot where the dead brute lay slain beneath the newspaper. Everywhere I went the newspaper winked at me ... when I went to the bathroom, I had to walk past it; when I went to our bedroom, I could see it waiting for me patiently for me to pick it up and facilitate the necessary closure of this (unnecessarily) protracted historical drama.

When I went to iron a shirt or put away laundry, I had to step over it, which sent shivers up my spine. All kinds of diabolical thoughts haunted me.

"What did the corpse look like by now? Will it rot and disintegrate? Will it eventually develop an odour? Will it attract curious members of other species to investigate it as possible carrion for their young to eat? Will its next-of-kin come to investigate his inexplicable absence from home? What if I had only wounded it and it now was languishing in unbearable pain beneath the paper? Worse still: What if the spider is not dead, but had in the meantime miraculously escaped my brutal assault and is now waiting for me underneath the pillow on my bed? We have already heard ... they rarely if ever forget a face!"

And so it went on for two whole days, and the later it became, the less I felt like peeking underneath the newspaper to inspect the grim results of my macabre attack the day before and that now, in retrospect, had become so laughably out of proportion with the actual threat the poor creature must have posed ... remember King Kong and Woody Allen? It was clear that I had had no stomach for killing ... in the days of Henry VIII, I suppose, I probably would have been tasked with nothing more masculine than keeping his palace-library and kingdom-archives neat and tidy.

In fact, I was beginning to wonder if I should not administer first aid to the dead corpse to see if I could revive the poor creature as it lay prostrate underneath the newspaper ... overnight the treacherous alien intruder had suddenly become an injured 'patient' to be pitied. To add further insult to injury (my injury, mind you, as the traumatised perpetrator of what now looked like unnecessary carnage) the words of wisdom, spoken years ago by the motivational speaker, Dr. Leo Buscaglia, and with which I, a corporate trainer by vocation, had grown up all these years, kept on reverberating through my mind:

"*If you cannot be kind to the Earth's dear creatures, will you at least try not to hurt them?*"

Eventually I was walking through our home, fretting like a gibbering idiot home from a mental institution. Toward the end of the second day (after the 'incident') my wife returned home from her two-day stay with our kids and grandchildren in Eldoraigne. It was only after she had taken the usual route upstairs to change into something more comfortable that I realised that I had completely forgotten to brief her about the 'cadaver' in the passage. She stopped, looked down at the newspaper on the floor, and asked, matron-like:

"Hey, what's this ... What's this newspaper doing in the middle of the floor?"

And, before I could say anything she had lifted the newspaper up and placed the lifeless little carcass in her open palm, asking:

"*What's this doing on the floor ... you know, this thing underneath the newspaper?*"

I turned around and froze: It was a hideous rubber facsimile of a large, lethal killer-ant (remember the frightening movie '*Them'?),* i.e., one of those silly toys that they sell at the mall and which one of the grandchildren must inadvertently have dropped on the floor the previous weekend; we've probably been kicking it around on the floor until it finally emerged as the spider-intruder that had to be killed above all costs. Poor thing ... I have bludgeoned it over and over to make sure it was dead ... and now, what a joke (on me). Did I mention that my eyesight had not been too good lately?

References

1. Arc.Agric.za. *Neurotoxic Spiders/Southern Africa.* Online 2022.
2. Britannica.com. *Conspiracy Theory.* Online 2022.
3. Clarke, James (1969) *Man is the Prey.* Stein & Day. New York.
4. ClevelandClinic.org. *Arachnophobia/Fear of Spiders.* Online 2022.
5. Wikipedia. *Amazon Rainforest.* Online 2022.
6. Wikipedia. *Arachnid.* Online 2022.
7. Wikipedia. *Ceylon Tea.* Online 2022.
8. Wikipedia. *Edmund Burke.* Online 2022.
9. Wikipedia. *Eldoraigne/Centurion.* Online 2022.
10. Wikipedia. *King Kong.* Online 2022.
11. Wikipedia. *Leo Buscaglia.* Online 2022.
12. Wikipedia. *Popeye.* Online 2022.
13. Wikipedia. *Them! (film).* Online 2022.
14. Wikipedia. *Woody Allen.* Online 2022.

26

The Great Race

It often amuses me to hear men impute all their misfortunes to fate, luck, or destiny, whilst their successes or good fortune they ascribe to their own sagacity, cleverness ... etc.
[S.T. Coleridge, 1772-1834].

In 1957, when I was about nine years old, I was sitting on the floor paging through a magazine in the kitchen of my cousin JimmyS.'s house, not far from where we lived in Randgate, when I came across this charming little children's short-story of a soapbox-derby and its plucky little winner, an ordinary, nine-year old wee boy. What had fascinated me was the sketch on the first page ... it was of the young winner, seated in a typical soapbox of the time, and coming down a steep hill with the dash of a racing car driver at a Daytona 500 or Kyalami event.

The story fascinated me, and I instinctively daydreamed with myself as the gallant driver of that soapbox-car and the undisputed winner of the soapbox-derby, a la 'Walter Mitty'. Nevertheless, after I had read the magazine and enjoyed my aunt's aromatic, well-brewed Ceylon-tea and a thick slice of home-baked bread with homemade plum-jam, I waved the people goodbye and started for home. Thereafter I never gave the soapbox story even as much as a second thought.

During the 1961 school-holidays, four years after I had read the magazine mentioned earlier, I was visiting my grandparents in Cottesloe, Johannesburg when my uncle GullisG. asked me whether I would be interested in entering for a soapbox-derby in Krugersdorp, a town about a 30 minutes-drive from Cottesloe. He explained to me that his kid brother, FrikkieG., the object of the story in an earlier chapter *Army Blues*) and who much later was to have that nasty experience with the dead frog on his bayonet as a conscript in the army and now the (designated) younger driver for his team, had withdrawn from the race. A 'team' was to consist of the father-and-son (or 'guardian-and-son') who were to race separated races, i.e., there was a competition for the younger drivers and a second one for the 'father-drivers'.

I immediately agreed to drive the car and started to prepare for the race that was to happen on the upcoming Saturday; at the time I was about 14 years old. Bear in mind that the rules for this soapbox-derby had been considerably relaxed over the years by the Round Table organisation to allow any homemade model of a 'soapbox type' car to enter the race, provided no ball-bearings were used in any of the wheels, which was considered an unfair advantage to the driver of a car sporting such wheels.

My car was a sleek, white racing car of a very modern design, a real funky little beast, as both my uncles GullisG. and CorrieG. had been adept with the design and constructing of modern soapbox cars and winning trophies all over the place since their childhood-days in Craighall Park and Braamfontein. Gone were the days when a soapbox-car was made from an actual 'soapbox'.

On the day of the race (called a 'derby') we all assembled on top of Hospital Hill where the Krugersdorp Hospital, now the 'Yusuf Dadoo Hospital', was situated. It was, incidentally, the same hospital where my grandmother on my father's side had died in 1954 from a botched gallbladder-operation. All entrants were allowed one practice run to acquaint themselves with the lie of the track, which ran about 150 yards (about 137 metres) down Hospital Hill and up the incline at the end of Hospital Avenue where race-marshals were geared to grab the cars and stop them, while at the same time marking out the winners of the first three places.

I have never been a particularly competitive type of individual, but on that day, things simply worked mightily in my favour for which I was very grateful, because my uncle had had all his hopes on me and had really spent a lot of time perfecting the little car for the great day. I won

the race easily, and my only serious competition was another cute little number that crossed the finishing line a few metres behind me.

The second miracle of the derby was when my uncle, tall and sinewy, got into the same little car (looking like John Wayne on a donkey) and won his race in the 'Fathers-competition'. Our day was made, and we floated deliriously on a pink cloud of victory all the way home to Cottesloe, after we had been photographed by the local press, the newspaper-clipping of which still adorns my photo-album after 60 years; and after we had received our prizes for winning: My uncle received some tools and I a cute little silver-cup, about 10 cm high. We were both also showered with some 'American hotdogs', so in vogue during the sixties, the concept of which had arrived in South Africa at about the same time as the 'drive-in-theatre' craze.

It was only much later that it dawned on me that, the winning photograph of me in the *Die Wesrander,* the local newspaper, was an almost exact replica of the sketch I had seen in 1957 in that children's magazine. It was simply incredible how providence had blessed me with a wonderful dream come true on that fateful Saturday in 1961! It had taken four years for the dream or vision to be transformed into the actual concrete substance, complete with its corresponding accolades and prizes.

It could impossibly have been anticipated or precipitated by me, as my uncle, who had arranged my 1961-participation for me, did not know about my 1957-experience with the magazine and, secondly, I had been too hopelessly young and naïve at the time to anyway have ever engineered such an uncanny coincidence all on my own; it sure was providence all the way from start to end.

References

1. Britannica.com. *Samuel Taylor Coleridge.* Online.
2. Healthline.com. *Ceylon Tea.* Online.
3. KyalamiGrandPrixCircuit.com. *Kyalami Grand Prix Circuit.* Online.
4. New Yorker.com. *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty (James Thurber).* Online.
5. Roundtablegauteng.com. *Round Table/History.* Online.
6. SAVenues.com. *Craighall Park.* Online.
7. Wikipedia. *Braamfontein.* Online.
8. Wikipedia. *Daytona 500.* Online.
9. Wikipedia. *Hot Dog.* Online.
10. Wikipedia. *John Wayne Filmography.* Online.
11. Wikipedia. *Soapbox Derby.* Online.
12. Wikipedia. Walter Mitty. Online.
13. ZA.Geoview.info. *Cottesloe/South Africa.* Online.

27

There is Something about a Mountain

Sweetest melodies are those that by distance are made more sweet.
[William Wordsworth, 1770-1850].

There's something about a mountain that reaches to the sky!' ring the illustrious words by William and Gloria Gaither, the celebrated songwriters, and what a joy (and challenge) to take the long seven-kilometre trek on foot up the Amphitheatre in Kwazulu-Natal toward the Tugela Falls, at 948 m (3110 ft), allegedly the second-highest falls in the world after the Angel Falls in Venezuela, although the claim by the Angel Falls is reportedly being challenged for validity.

We left at 10am to reach the foot of the falls at about 2 pm, upon which we decided to turn back earlier than planned to reach the gate to the Royal Natal National Park before it closed to the tourist at 6pm.

Even at the foot of the falls we still have had to negotiate a sea of boulders, some the size of houses, to reach the falls proper, the privilege of which we unfortunately had to forfeit for the security of a safe return trip lest we be caught inside the park and had to spend the night in our cars and the chilly open air without proper preparations.

As we turned around, after we had bathed our weary feet in the icy waters of the Tugela mountain-springs, the twin sentinels and mighty buttresses of Mount-aux-Sources bid us a sad adieu as if we had been friends forever. On this site many a Voortrekker-party en route north to the 'promised land' had been ambushed by the warlike Zulus of the 19th century; and here too the blood of both the brave British-soldier and Zulu-warrior had flowed during the battles of Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift. By the time we reached the gate my feet were in ruins ... ruins that today are (thankfully) still in 'mint condition'.

It was also here that Lord Redvers ('Reverse') Buller had forded the mighty Tugela (in flood) to fight the Boers at the besieged Ladysmith and the *Battle of Spioenkop* during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, encapsulated by camera in the memorable 1964 film 'Zulu' starring Stanley Baker, Jack Hawkins and a youthful Michael Caine, with South Africa's Chief Gatsha Buthelezi as the Zulu monarch.

The camera work was simply exquisite making the most of the magnificent Amphitheatre of the Royal Natal National Park as backdrop. The Drakensberg Amphitheatre has been described as follows:

> *"The Amphitheatre is one of the geographical features of the Northern Drakensberg, South Africa, and is widely regarded as one of the most impressive cliff faces on earth. The cliff face of the Amphitheatre is roughly three times the size of the total combined area of all the cliff faces in Yosemite's famous El Capitan, and more than 10 times the size of El Capitan's most famous (South Western) face. It is part of the Royal Natal National Park.*
>
> *The Amphitheatre is over 5 kilometres (3.1 mi) in length and has precipitous cliffs rising approximately 1,220 metres (4,000 ft) along its entire length.[1] The bottom of the valley floor, from where many photographs of the mountain structure are taken, is over 1,830 metres (6,000 ft) below the highest point of the amphitheatre (the summit being over 3,050 metres (10,000 ft) above sea level— with Mont-Aux-Sources just over 3,254 metres (11,000 ft) above sea level). The Tugela Falls, the world's second tallest falls, plunge over 948 metres (3,100 ft) from the Amphitheatre's cliff tops."*

My experience with mountains is sketchy at best. Our visit to Table Mountain in 2009 during the *Cape Argus Cycle Tour* was a memorable experience for the magnificent view on the oceans, where the Indian and the Atlantic oceans meet, and of course of Robben Island a few kilometres away where Nelson Mandela had been imprisoned for 17 years before he was transferred to Pollsmoor Prison on the mainland. It was also on Table Mountain where General Jan Smuts had met the Royal Family, during their 1940's post-war tour of South Africa, for a publicity photo for the press. A dear friend of ours and former saxophone player in our church band, FerdieB., now already deep into his eighties, was present that day on Table Mountain as part of the security detail for the Royal Family on their 3-months' tour of South Africa.

Our visit to Table Mountain in 2009 coincided with Clint Eastwood's making of *'Invictus'* starring Matt Damon, Morgan Freeman and Kyle Eastwood, and we bumped into Kyle Eastwood and his friends while we all stood ordering burgers from the diner on top of Table Mountain. Matt Damon and his brother had in the meantime entered the *Cape Town Cycle Tour* and we were present at the finishing line when he and his brother arrived on a tandem bicycle to the applause and cheers of thousands of teeny-boppers and other fans.

Cape Town is also the home of the gruelling annual *Two Oceans Ultra-Marathon*. Through the years Table Mountain has been the subject of many stories and legends, so interestingly elaborated upon in Lawrence G. Green's 1947-book, *'Tavern of The Seas'*. Once, during the 1980s, we had to go up 'Sovereign Hill' adjacent to the little mining village in the Bushveldt (where we had lived for 11 years) to fight some fires that were probably ignited by lightning, a common scourge during the winter-season for the dry grass and other highly combustible flora endemic on the mountain.

Fortunately for us, after a scorching afternoon fighting the fires on steep inclines and with winds turning, without proper warning, any which way they liked, the fires abated after a downpour descended mercifully on the embattled mountain. The fires were not only threatening mining infrastructure and operations as well as the civilian population down in the valley but were also destroying valuable indigenous fauna and flora on the mountain proper. It was no joke to hear the helpless little mice and baby birds shriek and squeal in terror while they were being engulfed in flames.

After the fires had gone out, we wanted to get back home as a soon as possible. We were literally freezing, as the rain that had been drenching us at that altitude, in such proximity to the clouds that had been dispensing it so courteously, was near the temperature of ice. We could, however, only depart for home after we had clambered like wet chickens out of our light delivery vehicle, where we had been seeking refuge from the torrents bearing down on us, in order to collect some big rocks to dump into the *donga* (ravine) in front of us that had in the meantime turned into a raging torrent of muddy waters, the reason for it to enable us to cross the *donga* safely in our small truck.

This initiative took about twenty minutes to accomplish, after which the three of us could finally attempt the dangerous descent down the slippery and winding mountain road.

One thing is certain: What a glorious sight to stand on that mountain and look down on the sleepy little mining village, with mists and clouds covering it like a hamlet in Austria with the streetlights suddenly, at about 6 pm., lighting up the town like a Christmas tree on Christmas Eve. It was like a movie-scene from Walt Disney's *'Pollyanna';* there's just something about a mountain!

Back home my wife had to assist me with peeling my wet, messy overalls from my body outside the house in the open air and eventually also help me get into a hot bath, eventually draining the bath at least hallway and again topping it up with cold water, because even the only 'lukewarm' water threatened to burn my icy cold anatomy to cinders.

Now Hans Meyer, a German geology professor and Ludwig Purtscheller, a mountaineer, are credited with the honour of first having conquered *Kilimanjaro* in Tanzania, at 19 341 ft. (5895

m) the highest peak in Africa. It is interesting how many ordinary people, i.e., 'laymen', have since scaled Kilimanjaro with the aid of local tour-guides in Tanzania. While Kilimanjaro remains a daunting challenge for any armchair-daydreamer, in Tibet mountains that high are sometimes considered a 'pass' or a 'saddleback' with some peaks straddling them topping 23 000 ft (7010 m) and even higher, as so colourfully described by Charles Allen in his 1982-book, *'A Mountain in Tibet'*.

The mountain I want to now focus on for the purpose of this story, however, is the 1460 m (4790 ft) hill of *Spioenkop* or 'Spy Hill' (Afrikaans: pronounce *spee-yune-cop*) in Kwazulu-Natal. This is the site where the *Battle of Spionkop* (as it is commonly known in the English vernacular) had taken place on 23 to 24 January 1900 between Boer and Brit during the first volleys of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. On this infamous 'hill', known for the many military blunders involved, 243 British soldiers lost their lives, most of them buried where they fell, while casualties tallied up to 1250 either wounded or captured. The Boers lost 68 dead, with 335 casualties, and Mohandas (the 'Mahatma') Gandhi, among others, served here as a stretcher-bearer for the British Ambulance Corps.

I was very excited when my son and our daughter-in-law drove us up this hill a few years back to visit the battlefield of Spioenkop. It is a dark and ominous place thick with fog and swirling mists when it drizzles, which was the case that morning. On top of the ghostlike hill, it is quiet; a quietude that is so serene it is almost audible. Even a sketchy knowledge of the history of the battle will suffice to help the savvy tourist or history-buff understand the lie of the terrain and the reason for the high casualty list among the belligerents. Rocks and big boulders are strewn helter-skelter all over the place, most of them still pockmarked by *Mauser*, *Lee-Enfield* or *Lee-Metford* bullets (I stand to be corrected) despite the more than a hundred years of inclement weather and the general ravages of time.

When we arrived on top, we commenced with visiting all the memorials that have been erected in honour of those who had perished, and then I made the unforgivable error of the typical novice ... I drifted away from the main party and got lost in the fog. Getting lost on Spioenkop on a wet, heavily overcast day in thick fog was a foolish thing to do. It was a cold, wet day with low visibility and all kinds of ominous scents and odours mixed in with the aroma of wet grassland and mire. I then followed up the first error with another one even worse ... I panicked. As soon as I panicked, I started wandering like a person suffering from temporary amnesia in search of his lost identity.

The grass was tall and wet. Footpaths, if any, were badly delineated due to the overgrown grass and my sense of direction completely befuddled as I could not see any familiar or worthwhile beacon or object with which to re-orientate myself. Now, rumour had it that Spioenkop still featured ghosts from time to time. The irony was that, although I do not believe in ghosts, and although I was developing all kinds of shivers down my spine whenever I allowed myself to dwell on the taboo subject of ghosts, I eventually started wishing I could saunter into a ghost, either a khaki-clad 'Tommie Atkins' or a slouch-hatted 'Boer', as long as someone could point me the way back to our car. I would even have accepted directions from the 'Brocken Spectre', frightening as the prospect may be, but with no sun breaking through the clouds that possibility had to be ruled out too. My luck was out ... there clearly were no ghosts on the hill of Spioenkop at all.

I suspect that we are born with natural homing instincts, as I discovered our car not long afterwards; I had intuitively followed the logical strategy of zigzagging upwards (and not downwards) all the time, regardless of the hospitality (or lack thereof) of the terrain, for the simple reason that the Spioenkop battlefield (and our transport!) was at the top (plateau) of the mountain and not at the bottom. Despite that harrowing little experience it did not dampen my love for interesting mountains, for there is just something about a mountain that lifts our spirits and

elevates our mood to something much bigger than ourselves, as so aptly described by two famous award-winning songwriters:

"Oh, there's something about a mountain ...
That reaches to the sky,
That speaks of things eternal,
A hope that never dies;
Like the blessed Rock of Ages,
Repose amid the din,
I'll just look up to the mountains ...
and keep my trust in Him!"

[William & Gloria Gaither]

Not far from Spioenkop is the battle site where the *Battle of Colenso* had taken place, near the besieged town of Ladysmith. Now it has often been said that to have dined with Winston Churchill at the same table is to have dined with history, and it many a reader must have wondered why this was being said ... after all, what has the man really accomplished that warranted such an outburst of sugary sentimentality?

Well, for starters, the (apparently) irascible Churchill did, despite many strategic blunders which his critics were quick to cash in on, help Britain to victory in both World Wars I and II, he *did* become the prime minister of England exactly as he had predicted, and he *did* die on his father's birthday exactly as he had foretold his contemporaries many decades earlier. However, I think his eventual historic greatness was precipitated by another simple, apparently insignificant gesture of kindness few people are aware of today.

When, during the Battle of Colenso a young Boer-soldier, virtually still a child, lay prostrate and dying on the top of the mountain where he was mortally wounded, Churchill galloped up the hill with his horse to inspect the outcomes of the battle while stretcher-bearers for both sides (during a mutually agreed-upon truce) carried off the dead and wounded to places of safety. When he reached the spot where the Boer-boy lay shivering in the cold, Churchill jumped off his horse and started for the wounded boy to help him get to the bottom of the hill and to (rudimentary) medical assistance. William Camden has once said it so aptly: *"Betwixt the stirrup and the ground mercy I asked, mercy I found."*

The shivering child-soldier, however, declined, explaining that he could, as a result of the nature of his injuries, not be moved at all, and begged Churchill to leave him be; upon which Churchill jumped on his horse and again rushed all the way down the mountain back to camp, grabbed a blanket and galloped back to the dying soldier and covered him with it, thus allowing him to die in dignity and in peace. What had driven and inspired Churchill at that moment? Nobody knows, but I would like to venture a guess:

It must have been the mental image of a mother, her fingers gnarled with hard work, arthritis and old age and probably already a widow thanks to the war, weeping silently with bowed head in a lonely farmhouse hundreds of miles far away, wandering what on earth has happened to her only son. Was he safe ... was he okay? Greatness, as someone has already remarked, does not necessarily lie in the cleverness and cunning with which we outmanoeuvre and overcome great or 'bigger' men, but in the compassion and consideration with which we treat and regard 'smaller' men.

References

1. Allen, Charles. *A Mountain in Tibet.*
2. Britannica.com. *Angel Falls.* Online.
3. Britannica.com. *Mount-aux-Sources.* Online.

4. Britannica.com. *Tanzania*. Online.
5. Britannica.com. *Tugela Falls*. Online.
6. Britannica.com. *Voortrekker/People*. Online.
7. Britannica.com. *William Camden/British Historian.* Online.
8. Britannica.com. *Zulu/People.* Online.
9. BritishBattles.com. *Battle of Isandlwana*. Online.
10. BritishEmpire.co.uk. *Redvers Buller*. Online.
11. CapeTownCycleTour.com. *Cape Town Cycle Tour*. Online.
12. Christianity.com. *Christmas Eve*. Online 2022.
13. EarthSky.org/earth. *What is the Brocken Spectre?* Online.
14. Green, Lawrence C. (1947) *Cape Town: Tavern of the Seas.* Howard Timmins. Cape Town.
15. HistoryHit.com. *Spioenkop Battlefield/History & Facts.* Online.
16. Hymnologyarchive.com. *Bill & Gloria Gaither Biography.* Online.
17. Mauser.com. *Mauser.* Online.
18. Nature.Reserve.co.za *Royal Natal National Park*. Online.
19. PoetryFoundation.org. *William Wordsworth*. Online.
20. Robben-Island.org.za. *Robben Island Museum*. Online.
21. Royal.uk. *The Royal Family*. Online.
22. SAVenues.com. *Drakensberg Amphitheatre in Kwazulu-Natal*. Online.
23. TableMountain.net *Table Mountain*. Online.
24. TwoOceansMarathon.org.za. *Two Oceans Marathon.* Online.
25. Wikipedia. *Battle of Colenso*. Online.
26. Wikipedia. *Battle of Rorke's Drift.* Online.
27. Wikipedia. *Brocken Spectre*. Online.
28. Wikipedia. *Category/Mountains of Tibet.* Online.
29. Wikipedia. *Charles Allen/Writer.* Online.
30. Wikipedia. *Hans Meyer/Geographer.* Online.
31. Wikipedia. *Jan Smuts*. Online.
32. Wikipedia. *Ladysmith/Kwazulu-Natal.* Online.
33. Wikipedia. *Lawrence C. Green*. Online.
34. Wikipedia. *Lee-Enfield*. Online.
35. Wikipedia. *Lee-Metford*. Online.
36. Wikipedia. *Ludwig Purtscheller*. Online.
37. Wikipedia. *Mangosuthu Buthelezi.* Online.
38. Wikipedia. *Mount Kilimanjaro.* Online.
39. Wikipedia. *Nelson Mandela*. Online.
40. Wikipedia. *Pollyanna.* Online.
41. Wikipedia. *Second Boer War*. Online.
42. Wikipedia. *Tommy Atkins*. Online.
43. Wikipedia. *Venezuela*. Online.
44. Wikipedia. *Winston Churchill*. Online.
45. Zulumonarch.org. *Royal Zulu Monarch*. Online.

28

Radio Theatre: The Story without an Ending

Long experience has taught me that in England
nobody goes to the theatre unless he or she has bronchitis.
[James Agate, 1877-1947].

When I was still a youngster living with my parents at home, one of my father's favourite habits was to listen to the *Lux Radio Theatre* in bed on Sunday evenings. My father had a little portable radio in the bedroom with the volume turned up just enough to have enabled me to listen to those stories too; usually they were detective ('who-dunnit') mysteries in the Agatha Christie tradition, which I didn't really mind listening to at all. I must digress, however, for a moment or two to arrive at the gist of my story.

What happened was that my father had rolled out a bet to my friend GerritV. and I to ride our bicycles from Carletonville in the Western Transvaal (today the Northwest Province) to the port-city of Durban in Natal (today Kwazulu-Natal), about 600 kilometres. Those were the days before the super-highways of today, upon which bicycles and cyclists would not have been allowed anyway.

Our plan was to maintain a rather pedestrian pace over the traditional route comprising such towns as Heidelberg, Volksrust, Standerton, Mooirivier, Estcourt, Pietermaritzburg and finally Durban. This also included a ride over the now legendary hill of *Amajuba*, where the major clash of the *First Boer War* between Boer and British (under Major-General Sir George Pomeroy Colley) i.e., the *Battle of Majuba Hill*, had taken place on 27 February 1881, as well as past the scenic Howick falls (95m) on the Umgeni River in KwaZulu-Natal. Because of being heavily encumbered with sleeping gear, private luggage and some basic provisions etc. it took us ten days to complete the route to our destination of Durban.

At Heidelberg we made our first stop and 'outspanned' on what looked like an open lot shielded from the road by trees. By the time we slithered into our sleeping bags like escaped convicts it was already dark, and it was only in the early hours of the morning that we, with a monstrous truck bearing down on us with its headlights in our faces and its driver shouting abuse at us, that we discovered that we had outspanned on a construction site demarcated for a new shopping centre or something. We had escaped certain death by about five metres.

At our next stop, already deep into Zululand, we outspanned in a pinewood-plantation. South Africa is a country of thick bushveldt in some regions and large manmade plantations of eucalyptus, pine and other trees run by its forestry departments in other regions. South Africa is a tree-lover's paradise, and our indigenous baobab (the so-called 'upside-down tree') one of the undisputed giants of the world.

Now, when we departed from home on our bicycles my friend GerritV. had opted for a sleeping-bag only, while I, the coward, opted for a sleeping bag plus a blanket. GerritV. wanted to travel light, while I wanted to travel comfortably *('two different ideas ... and never the twain shall meet!'*). The consequence was that by day GerritV. negotiated the hills with relative ease, while I suffered, while by night I negotiated the cold with relative ease, while GerritV. suffered. In fact, that self-same night in the pinewood plantation I was wakened by the sound of a strange hullabaloo ... it was my friend, dressed in a tracksuit (our regulation pyjamas) with his balaclava (ski-mask) over his head and his hands stuck into his socks, who was, in an effort to keep warm, jogging in a circle on the dry pine needles (like stepping on crackers) all around our camping site, keeping me as well as a large assortment of other minor animal-species wide awake.

In passing I want to mention to the reader that Durban, with its rolling green hills and huge tracts of lush sugarcane-fields, still is one of the most picturesque cities on Earth. Its sub-tropical climate, temperate beaches and *Valley of a Thousand Hills* draw tourists from all over the world. Add to the region its rich proliferation of Anglo-Zulu and Anglo-Boer War battlefields and you have a tourist-paradise just waiting to be explored. The botanical gardens just inland form the CBD contains some massive, ancient indigenous trees and excellent other tree-specimens from all over the world, even from as far away as Australia.

A thing that fascinates me about Durban is its cosmopolitan atmosphere with its large Zulu and Indian component, in the city as well as in the suburbs. Christianity, Islam and Hinduism apparently predominate with Hindu-temples adorning hills in suburbs on the north coast by the dozens. In about 1952 my family and I went to check out a particularly attractive little Hindu-temple one day, standing there with an elephant (statue) inside guarding it as is the case with most such temples. When I again drove by that same temple as a 65-year-old man in 2012, I was surprised to find it still standing there intact as if nothing had changed, only this time it looked a lot smaller.

In Durban we slept over in a joint known as the 'Brockley Lodge' in Point Road, until we got scared off by the nightly wildlife (cockroaches and lice), upon which we opted for popular area and beach by the name of 'La Lucia' farther up on the North Coast. Here we outspanned under the stars on the open beach behind the safety of some dunes for two nights. There were several reasons, however, why we have had to cut our 'holiday' on the beach short.

First, being in such proximity to the sea, say about fifty metres, our bicycles had begun to rust almost immediately, and it became clear on the second day that for us the writing was on the wall. Second, it is virtually impossible to live like civilised human beings in sand on a beach ... that sand penetrates everywhere and everything all the time without respite, especially when the wind is blowing, which is just about 99% of the time. Unless one thus goes dressed all day like a Nubian in a desert, there can be no hope of ever escaping the scourge of the sand. The sand inevitably even penetrates the food. Third, shops were located too far away from our camping site and commuting between the beach and the shops had become a drag. Fourth, the locals did not take the presence of two vagrants in rags on their beach too kindly. Fifth, a stray dog, a Staffordshire bullterrier of Sir Percy Fitzpatrick's *Jock of the Bushveld* type, extensively scarred and dishevelled, had begun to insinuate himself into our camp, and we simply had to make an escape before the dog became too attached to us (or the other way around).

When we finally left for the Durban CBD, old 'Bruno', the off-the-cuff name that we in the meantime had conjured up for the dog, followed us for miles up the road behind our bicycles, but finally gave up the chase out of sheer exhaustion. It was a heartrending moment to simply let him go, but what could we do? Some trip-recommendations:

- Don't try to ride the sleek national highways of today. It is illegal and you will either get arrested or thrown off the road ... unless you get lucky and are run over by a high-powered German model car or a mammoth eighteen-wheeler truck first.

- South Africans drive like maniacs, so don't embark on cycle-tours in South Africa unless the race is formally organised and overseen by a race-administrator or something. It has been found that cattle in a truck en route to an abattoir in South Africa have, if they are lucky, about a fifty-fifty chance to reach that abattoir safely.

- An ordinary sleeping bag is not enough; take an extra blanket, unless the sleeping bag is of the high-powered thermal type that will keep you warm even in the Antarctic.

- Socks look silly on a man's hands in the middle of the night. Take (water-repellent) winter-gloves along.

- Pine-needles (dried), no matter how you stack them, do not make an ideal roadside bed. It takes about 50 cm of pine-needles (about 20 inches) to build a 5 cm (about 2 inches) thick pine-bed, and it still sleeps as hard as baked clay. Fifty centimetres of pine-needles take about fifty minutes to collect, i.e., progress may be calculated at about a centimetre-per-minute, unless you want to drag a large rake along on your bicycle (in which case South African road-ordinance regulations require a piece of red cloth visibly tied to the handle of the rake).

- Dogs in less affluent communities are friendlier toward aliens on bicycles than dogs in more affluent communities.

- Buses are more dangerous than the largest of dinosaurs. When a bus is noticed approaching from behind, pull off at the side of the road, then stop and get off your bicycle, move away from the road by at least ten metres and then sit and wait for the bus to pass before continuing your trip. Be careful though, there may be a large trailer (or, even worse, a smaller bus) right behind the bigger bus.

- Don't sleep on construction sites, unless you are dressed in construction safety-gear, your overnight camp has been properly barricaded and demarcated with reflective-tape, and all the necessary (regulation) safety-notices and safety-signs including a 'Heavy Vehicle-Approaching Early-Warning Siren' ('HVAEWS') have been erected.

- Don't make friends with lonely stray animals unless you are prepared to adopt them as your own and care for them for the rest of their life.

- When stopping beside the road for whatever reason (usually for fixing a puncture) make sure you scour the site for valuables first before continuing your trip. I once had to ride back about three kilometres to fetch my backpack which I had forgotten on the ground where we had disembarked for a roadside lunch. I would not have noticed had my bicycle not suddenly become so uncannily easy and light to manoeuvre ... much too easy and much too light to be true.

- One loses a lot of salt and other precious minerals and vitamins when riding a bicycle all day long, day in and day out, and the resulting depletion and insatiable thirst is simply unbelievable. Just drinking lots of water is not enough (in fact, it may only exacerbate the situation). Take the necessary 'nutritional' precautions to maintain fitness and health, come what may. A nice boon, even for me who was not a 'sweet tooth', was to, out of sheer desperation and not necessarily out of sagacity, eat the fruit and drink the syrup from a tin of canned peaches, a real lifesaver in the hot South African sun.

- If you must take a transistor-radio along, make sure to include the earphones.

Nevertheless, one incident which will stay with me for the rest of my life happened during the last night of our stay on the beach behind the dunes of La Lucia. Now my companion, GerritV., had brought a little transistor-radio along, many a times a source of little joy and much irritation along the road. If reception used to be bad on the road, it was even worse on the beach behind the dunes. They say that life is 10% about what is happening to you and 90% about what you are doing about it (which the professionals call 'damage control'). Well, listening to a transistor-radio

behind the dunes on a noisy tropical beach like the KwaZulu-Natal North Coast at La Lucia is 10% about enjoying the only available station and 90% about searching for it.

Miraculously, on our last evening, a Sunday evening, GerritV. was reclining in his sleeping-bag about two metres from where I was outspanned and was listening to a programme on 'Lux Radio Theatre' on his obnoxious little transistor radio. A detective story produced by Michael McCabe was playing, and it must have been something along the lines of *'Death of a Salesman'* or something similar.

Now, I cannot tell how many times I had before begged old GerritV. to switch off his incessant little radio before he went off to sleep. As there was no way in which I could escape from my undeserved status of 'captive audience' unless I was prepared to leave the warmth of my snug sleeping-bag, I usually have had to endure the punishment indefinitely, for he tended to forget about my not-so-unreasonable request, and had often left me with the burden of having to listen to all kinds of ear-splitting, outlandish music and flippant, cheap DJ-talk until deep into the night and the early hours of the morning before he eventually emerged from hibernation like an inebriated bear nursing an old hunting-injury and switched off the radio.

I don't know about you, but for me there is something curiously diabolical and primeval about pop-music playing riotously on a cheap transistor-radio behind the dunes on a beach, with wind blowing and waves pounding the rocks, at 3am in the morning. South Africa is an enigmatic country with world-class academics, scientists, technologies and the corresponding institutions on the one hand, but, on the other hand, juxtaposed against an indigenous culture in some places, especially in remote, rural areas where ancestral worship and cannibalism in some communities still can be found.

For instance, the same country that produced a Christian Barnard and the world's first ever human-to-human heart transplant in 1967 recently reported that a jealous (jilted) lover was caught by police (in the Gugulethu township in Cape Town) on 9 June 2014 eating his rival's heart ... with a knife and fork. The irony was that this dude was eating the heart of his rival in the same city where the first heart transplant operation was performed 47 years earlier on 3 December 1967 ... what progress, and that after only 47 years! A redeeming factor, I suppose, was that he was eating with a knife and fork, which must be an indication of development in the right direction. A wise man once asked the question:

> *"Is it progress if a cannibal uses a knife and fork?"*
>
> [Stanislaus, 1875-1966].

That Sunday-evening, however, was different. An interesting detective story was playing on Lux Radio Theatre, and the plot was exciting indeed. As the suspense in the storyline was mounting toward its psychological climax (a la Agatha Christie & Co) and the identity of the killer was slowly beginning to emerge, my friend suddenly stuck his arm out of the sleeping-bag, checked his watch for the time (for he had one of those cheap Japanese watches that didn't 'tell' the time; he had to physically look at it), reached out, and half sleepily and befuddled, for once did the kind and courteous thing and switched off the electrifying detective story that was playing on Lux Radio Theatre ... just a pity that it was at the wrong time. It has been decades since our bicycle-trip to La Lucia on the North Coast outside Durban, and I still do not know who the murderer in the detective story that evening on Lux Radio Theatre was.

References

1. AgathaChristie.com. *Agatha Christie: The world's best-selling author of all time*. Online.
2. Britannica.com. *Agatha Christie.* Online.
3. Britannica.com. *Christianity.* Online.
4. Britannica.com. *Durban*. Online.

5. Britannica.com. *James Agate*. Online.
6. Britannica.com. *Zululand*. Online.
7. Fitzpatrick, Percy (1907) *Jock of the Bushveld*. Longmans, Green & Co,
8. MayoClinic.org. *Heart Transplant*. Online.
9. Military Wiki/Military-History.Fandom.com. *George Pomeroy Colley*. Online.
10. RadioEchoes.com. *Lux Radio Theatre South Africa/1957*. Online.
11. SAVenues.com. *Heidelberg, Gauteng*. Online.
12. SAVenues.com. *La Lucia*. Online.
13. SouthAfrica.co.za. *Baobab Trees*. Online.
14. SouthAfrica.co.za. *Estcourt History, Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa*. Online.
15. Wikipedia. *Amajuba District Municipality*. Online.
16. Wikipedia. *Amajuba*. Online.
17. Wikipedia. *Anglo-Zulu War*. Online.
18. Wikipedia. *Antarctic*. Online.
19. Wikipedia. *Battle of Majuba Hill*. Online.
20. Wikipedia. *Christiaan Barnard*. Online.
21. Wikipedia. *Death of a Salesman*. Online.
22. Wikipedia. *Estcourt*. Online.
23. Wikipedia. *First Boer War*. Online.
24. Wikipedia. *Gugulethu*. Online.
25. Wikipedia. *Hinduism*. Online.
26. Wikipedia. *Howick Falls*. Online.
27. Wikipedia. *Islam*. Online.
28. Wikipedia. *James Percy Fitzpatrick*. Online.
29. Wikipedia. *Jock of the Bushveld*. Online.
30. Wikipedia. *Kwazulu-Natal North Coast*. Online.
31. Wikipedia. *Mooi River (Town)*. Online.
32. Wikipedia. *Northwest (South African province)*. Online.
33. Wikipedia. *Nubians*. Online.
34. Wikipedia. *Pietermaritzburg*. Online.
35. Wikipedia. *Standerton*. Online.
36. Wikipedia. *Transvaal*. Online.
37. Wikipedia. *Umgeni River*. Online.
38. Wikipedia. *University of the Witwatersrand*. Online.
39. Wikipedia. *Valley of a Thousand Hills*. Online.
40. Wikipedia. *Volksrust*. Online.

29

Rhino Poachers

"If you destroy a free market you create a black market.
If you have ten thousand regulations you destroy all respect for the law."
[Winston Churchill, 1884-1965].

The rhinoceros *(Rhinocerotidae)* or *rhino*, as it is also affectionately known, is a heavy, robust animal with remarkable horns, although not horns in the true sense of the word, but horns made up of a thick boscage of caked hair. The rhino is well-known for its aggression and the heavy-set chassis and short stumps for legs can be quite deceptive ... it reportedly can cover short distances in a remarkable short time. Captain W. Cornwallis Harris describes the rhino as:

> *"... a swinish, cross-grained, ill-favoured, wallowing brute, with a hide like a rasp, an impudent cock of the chin, a roguish leer from the corner of his eye, a mud-begrimed exterior, and a necklace of ticks and horse-flies."*
>
> [Cornwallis Harris: 81].

According to Wikipedia, in South Africa we distinguish between the two major types of rhinos, i.e., the (so-called) *white rhino* (*Cerathotherium simum*) and the (so-called) *black rhino (Diceros bicornis)*. The larger of the two is the grey or dark-grey and hairless white rhino that stands 2 metres at the shoulder and may weigh in the region of 2500 kg. The white rhino, with its wide mouth (hence the 'white' rhino, a perversion of 'wide') is a square-lipped, grazing animal and dwells in small herds on the African savannah.

The black rhino is found among the thorn trees of the game-reserves of Kwazulu-Natal and is smaller (132cm–180cm at the shoulder and weighing 800-1400 kg) and darker than the white rhino. It differs from the white rhino in that it is hook-lipped animal. This very aggressive animal can sometimes be seen plucking and eating leaves and branches from acacia trees in the reserves; in fact, it munches on those branches with menacing, dagger-like acacia-thorns as nonchalantly as if it were candyfloss. Other than the white rhino, the black rhino is an herbivorous browser, not a grazing animal.

The black rhino is native to Kenya, Tanzania, Cameroon, South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Angola and although referred to as black, may vary from brown to grey. An amusing characteristic is the fact that it is said that, whereas the calf of the black rhino usually will follow and walk behind the mother, the calf of the white rhino will usually walk on ahead of the mother.

The white rhino is considered the largest land mammal after the elephant. It was almost hunted to extinction by 1930 with only 28 left in the wild. The late Ian Player, game-ranger from the Natal Parks Board and brother of Gary Player, the golfer, has virtually saved it from extinction through many years of the dedicated application of scientific conservation protocols and species-nurturing.

According to Wikipedia, 98.5% of white rhino occur in five countries, i.e., South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Kenya and Uganda. Two subspecies are found, i.e., the *Northern* and the *Southern White Rhino*, although some experts believe that these are two distinct species. The RSA is considered the stronghold for the Southern White Rhino, but it has been reintroduced in Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Swaziland and in Mozambique to a lesser extent.

Interestingly, apparently 91 calves have been born in the San Diego Zoo Safari Park since 1972. Unfortunately, the rate of reproduction among captive-born Southern White Rhino females is low. The Northern White Rhino is considered 'critically endangered' and 'extinct in the wild'.

There are seven or eight subspecies of which three became extinct during historical times and one is on the brink of extinction. Today all rhinoceros is considered 'critically-endangered'. Wikipedia further reports that, in Africa, subspecies for the black rhino may, in short, comprise the following:

- *Southern Black Rhino/Cape Rhino* (Extinct)
- *North-Eastern Black Rhino* (Extinct)
- *Chobe Black Rhino* (Nearly extinct)
- *Uganda Black Rhino* (Considered extinct/almost extinct ... probably survives in Kenyan reserves)
- *Western Black Rhino* (Extinct)
- *Eastern Black Rhino* (Range limited to primarily Tanzania)
- *South-Central Black Rhino* (Extinct but reintroduced in Malawi, Botswana and Zambia)
- *South-Western Black Rhino* (Restricted to wildlife reserves in Namibia with sporadic sightings in Angola).

In his book, *Man is the Prey,* James Clarke writes on the Black Rhino as follows:

"The fact that the black rhinoceros, Diceros bicornis, is the most bad-tempered animal in the African bush is common cause and nobody would argue that when approached it is the animal most likely to charge – and that goes whether one is on foot, on a bicycle, on a horse, in a car or a truck ... Ian Player, Zululand's chief nature conservator and one of the world's top experts on rhinoceroses, told me: 'I have known several Africans to be killed by black rhino over the years and I doubt whether there is a game ranger in these parts who has not been charged by one. The only sensible thing to do when confronted by a charging rhino is find a tree and climb it – even four feet from the ground is usually safe enough. You can forget trying to sidestep a rhino. The best trick is to chuck your hat or bush jacket – or anything – in its way and hope that it will take it out on that ... no other animal is so magnificently unpredictable'."

[Clarke: 277, 278].

Some rhino-poaching statistics: (by courtesy of AfricaCheck):

- More than 400 rhino have been killed for their horn in South Africa alone since January 2011 at the time of writing.

- While ten years ago, a mere 25 rhinos were poached a year, the number taken in 2011 reached 448, and this year (2012) the number poached by 21 September stood at 430.

- Apparently South Africa lost 668 rhinos in 2012.

[AfricaCheck].

Three men were arrested in the Limpopo province on 17 June 2014 after they were caught with 112 sawn-off rhino horns in their possession, worth R160 million on the black market. In fact, I am listening to that TV-news insert as I write. One-hundred and twelve rhino horns mean 112 dead or maimed rhinos. Many experts believe that, had this 'industry' been legal, there probably would not have been any black market for rhino horn to begin with in the first place, echoing the words of Winston Churchill: *"Destroying a freemarket will create a blackmarket".*

Nevertheless, one black rhino apparently one day got sick and tired of humans, kicked all its toys out of the cot and went on to wreak a terrible vengeance on mankind by killing twenty-one people (most of them probably innocent of any rhino-abuse) with one single charge. In his book,

Man Is the Prey, big-game hunter James Clarke goes on to tell the story (Clarke: 280) of how this was accomplished:

> *"One of the most devastating charges by a black rhinoceros must surely have been the one recorded by Patterson where the animal charged out twenty-one slaves, who were attached by their necks to a long chain, filed down an East African bush track on their way to the coast. The rhinoceros impaled the centre man and the sudden jolt broke the necks of the others."*
>
> [Clarke: 280].

So, what are the medical properties of rhino horn, the stuff that poachers will so readily kill and commit murder for? It would appear as if the medical properties and benefits of rhino horn are, for all practical purposes, nil, nada, zero, zilch. In fact, persons using rhino horn for 'medical' purposes may end up ingesting poison or toxins injected by wildlife veterinarians to keep poachers at bay. The final word on the (so-called) marvellous medical properties of rhino horn:

> *"Dr. Raj Amin, at the Zoological Society of London, said: 'Medically it's the same as if you were chewing your own nails'."*
>
> [AfricaCheck].

References

1. AfricaCheck.org. *Africa Check*. Online.
2. Britannica.com. *Acacia*. Online.
3. Britannica.com. *Black Market*. Online.
4. Britannica.com. *Cameroon*. Online.
5. Britannica.com. *Free Market.* Online.
6. Britannica.com. *Kenya*. Online.
7. Britannica.com. *Rhinoceros*. Online.
8. Britannica.com. *Tanzania*. Online.
9. Clarke, James (1969) *Man is the Prey*. Stein & Day.
10. Hluhluwegamereserve.com. *Hluhluwe Imfolozi Park/Kwazulu-Natal/South Africa*. Online.
11. NationalGeographic.org. *African Savanna*. Online.
12. SavetheRhino.org. *Poaching*. Online.
13. Wikipedia. *Angola.* Online.
14. Wikipedia. *Black Rhinoceros*. Online.
15. Wikipedia. *Gary Player*. Online.
16. Wikipedia. *Kwazulu-Natal.* Online.
17. Wikipedia. *Limpopo.* Online.
18. Wikipedia. *Namibia*. Online.
19. Wikipedia. *Northern White Rhinoceros*. Online.
20. Wikipedia. *San Diego Zoo Safari Park*. Online.
21. Wikipedia. *Southern White Rhinoceros*. Online.
22. Wikipedia. *White Rhinoceros*. Online.
23. Wikipedia. *William Cornwallis Harris*. Online.
24. Wikipedia. *Winston Churchill*. Online.
25. Wikipedia. *Zimbabwe.* Online.
26. Wild.org. *Dr. Ian Player*. Online.
27. Zsl.org. *Zoological Society of London*. Online.

30

The Mother City

City life. Millions of people being lonesome together.
[H.D. Thoreau, 1817-1862].

Cape Town is considered the 'mother city' in South Africa. On our way to Cape Town one day a flight-attendant on the airplane said it probably was because 'everything took so long (at least nine months) to happen' in Cape Town.

Nevertheless, it remains one of the most picturesque cities on Earth. Coming down from 30 000 ft (9144m) in an airplane and dropping through that little window in in the clouds above through the Table Mountain 'tablecloth' makes the peninsula open beneath like a magic 'wormhole' into the next dimension is an epic event every time, just like dropping through C.S. Lewis' wardrobe into beautiful, mysterious Narnia.

Places of interest abound, from Table Mountain (3558 ft/1084 m), Lion's Head (2195 ft/669 m), Devil's Peak (3281 ft/1000 m) and Cape Agulhas (the most southerly point on the continent) to Robben Island where Nelson Mandela was incarcerated for 17 years, and the historic Castle (more of a fort, really) built by Jan Van Riebeeck, Dutch administrator of the Cape from 1652 to 1662.

Kirstenbosch offers a lovely botanical garden at the foot of the Table Mountain Nature Reserve, and for those interested in monuments and memorials, there is the Groote Schuur prime minister's residence and the Rhodes Memorial, both designed by the prolific British architect, Sir Herbert Baker, architect of the Union Buildings in Pretoria and the twice imposing twin Secretariats in India.

The revolving Table Mountain cable-car, will, if the weather cooperates, take the visitor up the mountain in a jiffy providing spectacular 360° views of the city and the surrounding countryside. Robben Island is visible about 12 kilometres away from the top of Table Mountain, the mountain where General Jan Smuts, on foot from the bottom of the mountain, had rendezvoused with the Royal Family in 1947 during their post-war visit to South Africa.

Apparently, the *Cape Argus* (Newspaper, Est. 1857) has been hosting the 109 km/68 miles *Cape Town Cycle Tour* since 1978 with, when the going is good, as many as 35 000 entrants at a time. In 2009 my son and daughter also entered for the race, although they are not serious contestants for first prize but had entered the race for the pure fun of it. That race was plagues by inclement weather, and they were eventually forced to, along with many others, withdraw from the race.

Historic little villages adorn the foot of Cape Town, like Houtbaai ('Wood Bay') where delectable fresh fried fish direct from the catch is offered daily on the quay; Kampsbaai ('Camps Bay') with it thriving beachfront for holiday-revellers and the old British naval port of Simon's Town with its historic, picture-perfect homes and shops. Boulder offers swimming facilities as well as huge photogenic granite boulders embellished with its iconic penguins. Clifton is also famous for bathing and tanning and whales may be watched at Valsbaai ('False Bay') etc. The Peninsula is a micro-cosmos on its own, and the 'Table Mountain National Park' also constitutes part of UNESCO's 'Cape Floral Region World Heritage Site'.

Cape Town has seen many international faces from the movie industry. Christopher Lee, 'Count Dracula' of filmdom, now deceased and whose brother used to live in Johannesburg, used to be a regular visitor to South Africa. His film, *Safari 3000* was shot, among others, in the Krugersdorp Game Reserve, not far from where we live.

Something I will never forget about Table Mountain was the fact that, while two from our party could have scaled the Mountain by cable car and seen it at a discount, in the end three from our party have had to pay full price for the four tickets nevertheless, and quite unnecessarily so. You see, my son Deon and daughter Cecilia were participants in the *Cape Town Cycle Tour* around the Cape Peninsula that weekend in 2009, and on the Saturday prior to the tour they had gone to the Good Hope Centre, a well-known landmark convention-centre, to register and receive their tour-paraphernalia and some gifts, compliments of the sponsors.

As they were only going to ride on Sunday and we were in a hurry to go in the cable-car up Table Mountain, they dumped the large envelopes containing the tour-paraphernalia in the hotel rooms and together with us got started for the visit to Table Mountain. The tickets for the cable car up the mountain do not come cheaply, and, as my son was footing the bill, I even have had to invoke my pensioner (retiree) status to receive some discount on my ticket at least.

The following morning, having to drive back to our home in Pretoria, a 1500 kilometre drive up north on the N1, it was only after we had opened those large white envelopes just before throwing them away that we discovered that they also contained two (non-returnable, non-transferable) complimentary tickets for my son and his wife, participants in the cycle race, to go up Table Mountain at a discount, compliments of the *Cape Town Cycle Tour* sponsors ... 24 hours too late.

References

1. Aparchive.com. *Royal Tour/Visit to Table Mountain & Departure*. Online.
2. Britannica.com. *Cape Town*. Online.
3. Britannica.com. *Devil's Peak (South Africa)*. Online.
4. Britannica.com. *Herbert Baker*. Online.
5. Britannica.com. *Simon's Town*. Online.
6. CapeTownCycleTour.com. *Cape Town Cycle Tour*. Online.
7. InsideGuide.co.za. *Lion's Head (Cape Town)*. Online.
8. NelsonMandela.org. *Biography of Nelson Mandela*. Online.
9. Robben-Island.org.za. *Robben Island Museum*. Online.
10. Sanbi.org. *Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden*. Online.
11. Sanparks.org. *Table Mountain National Park*. Online.
12. Summerschool.uct.ac.za. *The Royal Visit of 1947: Pomp & Circumstances*. Online.
13. TableMountain.net. *Table Mountain Cable Car*. Online.
14. TableMountain.net. *Table Mountain*. Online.
15. Unesco.org. *Cape Floral Region Protected Areas*. Online.
16. Unesco.org. *UNESCO*. Online.
17. Wikipedia. *Atlantic Ocean*. Online.
18. Wikipedia. *Boulders Beach*. Online.
19. Wikipedia. *C.S. Lewis*. Online.
20. Wikipedia. *Camps Bay*. Online.
21. Wikipedia. *Cape Peninsula*. Online.
22. Wikipedia. *Castle of Good Hope*. Online.
23. Wikipedia. *Clifton, Cape Town*. Online.
24. Wikipedia. *Dutch Language*. Online.
25. Wikipedia. *False Bay*. Online.
26. Wikipedia. *Good Hope Centre*. Online.
27. Wikipedia. *Groote Schuur*. Online.
28. Wikipedia. *Henry David Thoreau*. Online.
29. Wikipedia. *Houtbaai*. Online.
30. Wikipedia. *Indian Ocean*. Online.
31. Wikipedia. *Jan Smuts*. Online.
32. Wikipedia. *Jan van Riebeeck*. Online.
33. Wikipedia. *Rhodes Memorial*. Online.
34. Wikipedia. *Safari3000 (film)*. Online.
35. Wikipedia. *Secretariat Building, New Delhi*. Online.

36. Wikipedia. *The Chronicles of Narnia (films).* Online.
37. Wikipedia. *Union Buildings*. Online.
38. Wikipedia.org. *Invictus (film/Clint Eastwood).* Online.

31

The Obesity Pandemic (Really?)

I am not much in fear of these fat, sleek fellows, but rather of those pale, thin ones.
[Julius Caesar, 102-44 B.C.].

Everywhere we look, they say there is an 'obesity pandemic' at large in the world today, and South Africa is no exception to the rule. Friends, if you don't know it yet, there is a pandemic in South Africa ... an 'obesity pandemic'.

And the more they say it, the more people flock to doctors and pharmacists (for prescriptions for diet-pills), to slimming-clubs (for weight-loss regimes and recipes) and to gymnasiums (for exercise, health and fitness).

People's quest for 'slimness' has, reportedly, become a multibillion-dollar industry the world over. Business-wise, it is apparently in the financial interest of the slimming clubs and the pharmaceutical industry that people continue to believe that they are 'seriously' overweight, 'morbidly' obese and 'too' fat, and not the other way around. Maybe the time has arrived for so-called 'fat people' to investigate who the real and regular sponsors of all the 'independent obesity research' programmes really are. If it is the pharmaceuticals (the manufacturers of diet-pills) are in any way involved, whether directly or indirectly; implicitly or explicitly, then it may mean an unethical conflict of interest which ought to be investigated.

Some critics of the weight-loss industry believe that there may be some vested interests behind it all in whose interest it is to keep us pathologically worried about our 'overweight' (as defined by the BMI-factor) while it has been argued in some of the literature that the concept of 'overweight' should be 'culturally' defined, and not necessarily 'science' defined; in some cultures it may be advantageous as a form of enhanced status to be opulently overweight.

I can remember as a teenager, in the 1960s, how we (stupidly) used to jog for miles with a plastic sheet wrapped around the waist, anything to lose those unwanted pounds and maintain that (so-called) 'sexy, lean-and-hungry' look. In the meantime, all we were shedding was precious, mineral and vitamin-rich water (body-fluids), and not 'fat'. I can remember the 1980s with all those housewives and career-women joining the slimming clubs by the hundreds and weighing their food on scales like a gold-merchant weighing gold-dust to a Wall Street financier (and they still do it).

Diet fads had come and gone as the decades rolled by: *The Drinking Man's Diet*; *Fit for Life*; *The Air Force Diet*; *Dr. Atkins' Low-Carbo & High-Protein* etc. In 1984, while trying to maintain a slim, debonair look at my job and for the clients (and perhaps address some of my allergies at the same time) I worked my weight down from about 85 kilograms to a skinny 65 kilograms in two months on the 'Atkins' diet.

I'll never do it again, however, for it was totally unnecessary. I didn't need to lose weight; I only had to get back into shape, regardless of my weight. *"Forget about losing weight; start building health!"* was the advice from legendary nutrition guru, Adelle Davis. Today I've put away the scales and only look at them occasionally; as far as I am concerned, I can weigh 1000 kilograms (metaphorically speaking) for all I care, provided I feel good and confident about myself and look (more or less) presentable in public; if I'm kind to my five main vertebrates by not overloading and punishing it with excess weight I believe I will be okay.

Admittedly, it is difficult, if not impossible, to feel good and confident about oneself without adhering to a gym or exercising regime in conjunction with a balanced, optimum diet. I don't think anything worthwhile can ever come without some effort.

For me the Atkins-diet was effective, but certainly not sustainable ... the rigours hopelessly too Spartan-like. I'd rather die happy and fulfilled at 70 by being modestly overweight while eating what I enjoy on birthdays and anniversaries (within the bounds of reasonable self-control) than look like a supermodel from a Nazi death-camp and live to age 200 by living on raw carrots, broccoli and sesame seeds for the rest of my life ... what would be the point, with the rest of the family (including children and grandchildren) deceased and gone?

For instance, it made me severely depressed as the low-carbo content probably did not encourage the release of enough of the 'happy hormone' serotonin fast enough to my brain, causing one to crave French fries and all kinds of carbohydrate treats that those boring celery sticks and depressing low-carb finger-foods cannot satisfy indefinitely.

Most people probably do not possess the discipline to adhere to the recommendations contained in that diet, or in any other diet too, for that matter. The consensus among many industry experts appears to be that *diets do not work*. Even effective diets are probably not sustainable in the long run. I have, consequently, in fact, made a pact with myself ... I refuse to 'diet'. I will perhaps fast for health or religious reasons, or for a season eat less (of everything) for health purposes, but I will not 'diet'. If unbiased research really had shown that no diet-regime in the world is sustainable in the long-term, why bother?

I do believe, however, in eating more selectively and more healthily. I, for instance, grew up with the adage, "*The whiter the bread, the quicker you're dead,* hence I refuse to regularly indulge in most of the white bread, pizza and all bulk foods prepared from refined high-carbohydrate bread & cake flours, although I practice the 80-20 principle as far as possible, i.e., sticking to healthier foods 80% of the time and cheating only about 20% of the time. After all, birthday celebrations are non-negotiable and who wants to live up to 300 years of age on raw carrots, celery sticks and cashew nuts?

I avoid too much sugar and syrupy foods, drinks and beverages. I remember a guy called Carlson Wade once writing: *"Eat food that is born not made!"* Processed meats are a no-no, but for some ridiculous reason we have not been completely weaned from it yet. Besides, at my age I need all the 'preservatives' I can get.

My father had grown up during the days of the so-called 'Afrikaner poor white crisis' of the 1930s in South Africa, an upshot from the mass-migration of rural whites to the city of Johannesburg, just after the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886. He was born in 1924 and died in 2013 at the ripe old age of 89. He seldom if ever fretted over his weight, he never really dieted, he sometimes jogged but not regularly, played the friendly round of golf now and then (but more 'then' than now) and he had been smoking since childhood up till his dying day.

When my father died in 2013, his body was totally infested with cancer, but just look at what he had accomplished:

- He has raised six children working hard as a shaft-carpenter on the mines
- He has maintained a thriving family business for many years with shops all over the place
- He has, in old age, retired as a full-time courier carrying parcels around in industry
- At the time of his retirement in 2012, he had been economically active as an independent, emancipated person for an incredible 71 years, and that with a Grade-10 school education from a school-career spanning 35 different schools over 10 years!

He had grown up on 'mieliepap' (cornmeal mush), sugar (white and brown), pork lard (on sandwiches and in the baking), fried eggs, fish and chips ('French fries'), bread (white and brown), chocolates, red meats, white meats, processed meats, real butter, cheese, milk as well as margarines (white and yellow) etc. So, if ever there was a walking time-bomb (nutritionally speaking) it was supposed to have been him ... yet he reached the age of 89 after a challenging

career and a fulfilling life, and that while the Bible has promised us no more than a lifespan of 70 years or 80 years at best.

I was at his bedside when he died ... at home in his bed without the need of a drip (for sustenance) or any auxiliary oxygen (to aid breathing). He had refused to go to hospital, and as the family couldn't afford professional frail-care, he has had to die at home in the comfort of his own bed. My sister applied some morphine stickers to relieve the pain, as well as an occasional sleeping pill to help him sleep. Apart from feeding him like a little bird with some bottled baby food and quenching his occasional thirst, he needed preciously little of anything else besides moral support and friendship, as well as the paramedical support of my brother CorrieS. (trained in first aid) and my sister CorneliaS.'s personal attending to his basic needs.

About a week before he died, he asked my mother to take away his cigarettes, as he was afraid that the bed and bedclothes might catch fire. So, he finally stopped smoking too at the ripe old age of 89. He eventually slipped away on a Sunday evening at about 8:30 pm, almost as they say like a Victor Hugo had once done many years before i.e., 'like a little child'. What did it matter that his body was infested with cancer? After all, we all must die of 'something'.

Nevertheless, it would appear as if the medical and weight-loss industry (and we) still have a lot to learn about health, weight, dieting and obesity. For instance, many today think that those Metropolitan Life type tables and BMI-guidelines depicting the so-called 'ideal weight' per body-type are a bit ambitious and impractical. One gets the impression that they were developed for supermodels, and not for real people. It would appear as if it would, health-wise, for instance, be much riskier for a person to maintain his/her weight too far below his/her recommended 'ideal' weight as prescribed by those tables over a protracted period, than maintaining it modestly above the recommended 'ideal' weight according to the tables.

My experience is that a gym or exercise routine does not guarantee weight-loss *per se*, but it does help in preventing future weight-gain, and it has considerable long-term health benefits in terms of body tone, fitness etc. Even should such person working-out lose not a single kilogram or pound, it still may change his/her appearance, looks and health-prospects for the better considerably. *"Forget about losing weight ... concentrate on building health!"*

The focus should apparently be on avoiding unhealthy eating habits and a 'sedentary lifestyle' like the plague. It would appear as if all extremes, whether 'too thin' or 'too fat', are risky and should be avoided anyway, but that it probably could be less risky to be modestly overweight than to be extremely underweight. According to some experts in the field people should learn to accept and celebrate their basic body-type (whether *endomorph*, *ectomorph* or *mesomorph*). The consensus lately seems to apparently lean toward the revised view that there is a serious *anorexia or emaciation pandemic* at large as against the traditional view of an *obesity pandemic* only.

Maybe it is both, and the reader is encouraged to read and study the available literature on the subject conscientiously before making any serious life-changing decisions. Now, obviously the mortality rate for everyone, regardless of race, gender, religion, body type or eating habits is, as C.S. Lewis says, 100% in every generation (so much for 'progressive evolution') but there seems to be an awful lot of fat people around these days, aren't there? During my young adult days, I also used to be frightfully thin and frail, and some doctors always used to ask me whether I was an ultra-marathon runner.

At the age of about 37, however, after I had taken some zinc-supplements for some silly skin ailment, I suddenly started gaining weight so much so that I had to give away most of my work attire in a matter of weeks. I had, over the decades, apparently been developing a zinc or mineral-deficiency which had produced that (sickly) lean-and-hungry look so many people admire. I only then discovered that farmers, when they want a healthy, big corn on the cob, they feed it, among others, more zinc. I have been more than my 'ideal (recommended) weight' ever since and am

battling the bulge just like any other healthy, glossy-haired, bright-eyed, wet-nosed and vigorous overeater today.

This brings us back to the million-rouble question: Is there really a runaway obesity pandemic in the world today? Some say yes, some say no. Others say the real problem is an anorexia or emaciation pandemic. They insist that, when people start dying from anorexia, emaciation or chronic low bodyweight problems, fat people will obviously (statistically) proliferate in numbers in the statistics as against skinny people, and obviously the thirty skinny ones in the mall will start wondering about the three-hundred fat ones milling about around them:

"Hey sweetheart, just look at the obesity pandemic!"

In the meantime, it may be the skinny ones who are going extinct. In other words, the answer to the question: *"Why are there so many fat people in the world today?"* may be very simple ... the skinny ones didn't make it.

References

1. AdelleDavis.org. *Adelle Davis Foundation.* Online.
2. Assessmentpsychology.com. *MetLife Height-Weight Tables.* Online.
3. Atkins, Robert (1972) *Dr. Atkins Diet Revolution: The High Calorie Way to Stay Thin Forever.* D. McKay Co.
4. Bacon, Linda (2010) *Health at Every Size: The Surprising Truth About Your Weight.* BenBella Books, Inc.
5. Britannica. *Witwatersrand.* Online.
6. Britannica.com. *Johannesburg.* Online.
7. Britannica.com. *Julius Caesar.* Online.
8. Britannica.com. *Noël Coward.* Online.
9. Britannica.com. *Pharmaceutical.* Online.
10. Britannica.com. *Victor Hugo.* Online.
11. Britannica.com. *World War 2.* Online.
12. Cameron, Robert (1962) *The Drinking Man's Diet.* Robert Cameron.
13. Campos, Paul (2004) *The Diet Myth.* Gotham Books.
14. *Davis, Adelle (1947) Let's Cook It Right.*
15. *Davis, Adelle (1951) Let's Have Healthy Children.*
16. *Davis, Adelle (1954,1970) Let's Eat Right to Get Well.*
17. *Davis, Adelle (1965) Let's Get Well.*
18. Dictionary.cambridge.org. *Slimness.* Online.
19. Fiore, Evelyn (1965) *The LC Low Carbohydrate Air Force Diet.* The Ridge Press.
20. Healthline.com. *Zinc Supplements. Online.*
21. Mayoclinic.org. *Bulimia Nervosa.* Online.
22. Medicalnewstoday.com. *What is BMI in Adults, Children & Teens.* Online.
23. Medlineplus.gov. *Carbohydrates.* Online.
24. Pubmed.ncbi.nih.gov. *Obesity Pandemic.* Online.
25. Time.com/magazine. *The Weight Loss Trap: Why Your Diet Isn't Working.* Online.
26. Webmd.com. *Anorexia Nervosa.* Online.
27. Wikipedia. *Adelle Davis.* Online.
28. Wikipedia. *C.S. Lewis.* Online.
29. Wikipedia. *Carlson Wade.* Online.
30. Wikipedia. *Fit for Life.* Online.
31. Wikipedia. *French Fries.* Online.
32. Wikipedia. *Paul Campos.* Online.
33. Wikipedia. *Robert Atkins/Physician.* Online.
34. Wikipedia. *Ultramarathon.* Online.

32

The Scourge of Soccer Hooliganism

Games are for people who can neither read nor think.
[The Lady, *On the Rocks*, George Bernard Shaw, 1856-1950].

One would think that, if people really wanted to be religious and worship something or somebody, they would worship something or somebody worthwhile, for instance somebody who could divide the Red Sea, walk on water and forgive sins ... and not the sun, the moon, the stars, tree-trunks and idols carved from wood and stone. Yet, in a video on soccer-hooliganism, one soccer-hooligan has had the audacity to state*: "It (soccer) is our religion!"* (Amazing).

Frankly I was appalled by what I had seen in those series on soccer-hooliganism, and at first could not believe by eyes nor my ears. Here we have rival teams shouting and screaming abuse, breaking down barbed-wire fences and barricades, setting soccer-jerseys and stadiums alight, vandalising trains, buses, and infrastructure, assaulting and killing each other, and even committing cold-blooded murder to the chanting of *"Rotterdam Hooligans! Rotterdam Hooligans!"* and *"Utrecht Hooligans! Utrecht Hooligans!"* etc.

Soccer hooliganism is defined as unruly, destructive and violent behaviour at matches or derbies involving brawling, intimidation and vandalism between rival soccer fans or 'firms', reportedly the British term for criminal soccer gangs.

> *"Football hooliganism involves a wide range of behaviour, including taunting e.g. by abusive chanting; sometimes obscene spitting; unarmed fighting;, throwing of objects on to the pitch, either in an attempt to harm players and officials or as a gesture of insult; throwing of objects at opposing supporters, including stones, bricks and Molotov cocktails; use of pyrotechnic devices such as flares and smoke bombs; fighting with weapons including sports bats, glass bottles, rocks, rebar, knives, machetes and firearms; disorderly crowd behaviour such as pushing, which may cause stadium fixtures such as fences and walls to collapse. Similar effects can occur when law-abiding crowds try to flee disorder caused by hooligans."*
>
> [Wikipedia].

Why do they do that? Has humanity sunk so low, and this after the horrors of WW1 and WW2? What went wrong ... has people been indoctrinated with Darwin's 'Evolutionary Theory' now for so long that they are now inevitably beginning to go 'ape'? Well, I suppose it is a matter of, *"In for a penny, in for a pound"* ... if scientists insist on saying I had evolved from an ape (or from some apelike, *hominid* precursor to humans) I might just as well act the part and make the anthropological insult worth my while!

In South Africa this anthropological insult has been elevated to the art of a lucrative theme-park at 'Maropeng', the so-called 'cradle of humankind', where people all over Africa and South Africa of all races, nations, tongues and cultures daily rendezvous to worship at the feet of a 19th century white colonialist (Darwin).

The question is: Why do they do it? What prompts them to lose all control to, in a matter of seconds, undergo such a dramatic metamorphosis as to be willing and able to kill the next guy just for belonging to a different 'firm'? What is wrong with Europe, including Eastern Europe, with its propensity and talent to create such mass-hysteria movements as *Nazism*, *Fascism*, *Stalinism*, *Communism*, *neo-Nazism*, and now *soccer-hooliganism*? The latter is, however, apparently rife in some Latin American countries as well.

I have a hunch that it is all about the way in which the game of soccer had developed. Take away the goalkeeper, for instance, and the hooliganism would probably begin to diminish. The goalkeeper is an enormous wet-blanket type of negative force in soccer, for no matter how exceptional the kicker and how accurate the shooter, a good and alert goalkeeper will probably stop the ball nine times out of ten. Here is why I say the goalkeeper should be outlawed:

- The goalkeeper represents everything that is negative in soccer. He is the reason that even an otherwise brilliant and an accurate shot will probably be deflected nine times out of ten.

- The goalposts are small enough to further complicate the issue with a goalkeeper.

- If the goalkeeper were to be removed, the odds for both sides will mathematically still have remained the same. Neither of the teams will have been either unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged, but at least the scores will probably have changed and become more colourful.

At the end of the game the mediocre team scoring 0 (nil) will, for all practical purposes, in the statistics and records be considered to have been just as good as the exceptional team scoring 0 (nil) due to all the deflected shots. In the meantime, the exceptional team will have deflected only two good shots (because there were only two) while the mediocre team will have deflected five or seven (because there were five or seven) good shots, thanks to a crafty goalkeeper. In other words, my submission is that the goalkeeper is the main wet blanket in soccer and probable cause for soccer-hooliganism.

The two goalkeepers' performance has in other words, corrupted the 'true scores', and, in the end, the entire soccer-match has been decided between two goalkeepers. So why then bother with the rest of the players of the field? Why not send them packing ... wouldn't it be much cheaper for everybody involved? What does a score of nil-nil, for instance after 50 years, anyway say about how the game was really played five decades ago?

The goalkeeper has thus for all practical purposes been invented to (i) compensate for such a team's mediocre goal-scoring ability on the one hand and (ii) frustrate the opposition's superior goal-scoring ability on the other hand. Target-soccer unmolested by the uncharitable and crafty goalkeeper will, instead, provide much more fun and satisfaction for all players, teams, fans (and firms!) involved, and will probably ensure higher and more interesting scores as well.

With the current rules an exceptional team can play exceptionally well and still score a lousy nil (0) (because of a good goalkeeper in the opposition) while the mediocre team will also score the same, i.e., nil (0) despite the exceptionally mediocre goalkeeper on the opposite side. It is unfair, statistically inaccurate, and most uninspiring to say the least.

When will FIFA and other soccer-administrators realise that a defeat of 15-14 is not nearly as demoralising as one of 1-0. In the event of a 15-14 defeat for the losing team, the losing team can, without detracting from the victory of the superior team, still walk away with a saved face and the consolation of a 15-14 defeat that was, psychologically, not that shabby after all.

A 1-0 defeat, no matter how good a team played, is a crushing, shattering, demoralising defeat. It is more than flesh and blood can bear, and anyway simply too close to yesterday's machine-like computer-language, punch-card syndrome of a '1' for a YES and a '0' for a NO. Life is not that simple, and the current soccer-format that allows a goalkeeper in the mix is wreaking havoc on the emotions of serious soccer-fans.

Go to any rugby match on any good day and see if you can detect anything at the goalposts that remotely resembles the equivalent of a 'goalkeeper', and that notwithstanding the fact the try-scorer in rugby has the width of the entire white line to exploit for a try.

So, why do the 'firms' fight and kill each other? The answer is easy, and the solution is simple: Remove the goalkeeper from the game and introduce target-soccer as the new FIFA soccer

format. Why should a good goal, which had taken at least twenty minutes to be engineered by the shooter and orchestrated by the team, be nullified in one second by one cunning and very bored goalkeeper who has had all the time in the world to rest, recuperate and contemplate the next move? Why should a bad goal, on the other hand, be rewarded just because of the other side's mediocre goalkeeper? If nothing in life is as constant and guaranteed as change, why can't or won't FIFA's rules change? Rugby-rules change all the time.

In rugby, the better (higher) scores, especially when reflected in newspapers, will create a more positive vibe for everybody involved, and the one job that will be on the line, i.e., the one of the goalkeeper can always be co-opted into the club in some way or the other. At least there will be one more extra brain available to help tally all the higher number of goals that will in future be kicked. I am convinced that, hypothetically speaking, all self-respecting soccer enthusiasts will rather go to the trouble of seeing their team lose 10-9 than seeing it lose 1-0. Just imagine the immense distances the 'firms' sometimes must travel, like going to Russia, to watch a game ... so, give them something (like higher scores) to live for.

I do not recommend the scrapping of the goalposts, just the removal of the unnecessary and annoying goalkeeper. Because of such a thing as a 'spoiler' (in the person of the goalkeeper) the various 'firms' (the soccer hooligan fraternities) are vying for the one and only prize available to them at a particular match thanks to a medieval and obsolete goalkeeper system ... i.e., the one single goal that will be probably scored for the day i.e. One (1) – Nil (0).

No wonder that anger escalates, tempers flare, bloodcurdling war cries ascent to high heavens and people die at soccer tournaments. Soccer has replaced war as WW3, and that all probably because of the goalkeeper.

References

1. Britannica. *George Bernard Shaw*. Online.
2. Britannica.com. *Red Sea*. Online.
3. Carmichaellegal.com. *Organized Crime & Gangs*. Online.
4. Fifa.com. *FIFA*. Online.
5. Wikipedia. *Association Football (Soccer).* Online.
6. Wikipedia. *Charles Darwin*. Online.
7. Wikipedia. *Cradle of Humankind*. Online.
8. Wikipedia. *Eastern Europe*. Online.
9. Wikipedia. *Europe*. Online.
10. Wikipedia. *Football (Soccer) Hooliganism*. Online.
11. Wikipedia. *Goalkeeper (Association Football).* Online.
12. Wikipedia. *Latin America*. Online.
13. Wikipedia. *List of Hooligan Firms/Soccer*. Online.
14. Wikipedia. *Organized Crime*. Online.
15. Wikipedia. *Religion.* Online.
16. Wikipedia. *Russia.* Online.
17. Wikipedia. *S.C.F. Hooligans*. Online.
18. Wikipedia. *World War 1*. Online.
19. Wikipedia. *World War 2*. Online.
20. World.rugby. *World Rugby.* Online.

33

Why Cowies Hill is Called 'Cowies Hill'

He thinks too much. Such men are dangerous.
(Caesar, Julius Caesar).
[William Shakespeare, 1564-1616].

'Kloof' in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal is described as follows:

> *"Kloof is a leafy upper-class suburb and small town, that includes a smaller area called Everton, in the greater Durban area of eThekwini in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.*
>
> *"The word Kloof (cf. cleft) means 'gorge' in Afrikaans and the area is named after the deep ravine formed by the Molweni stream (stream of high cliffs). The Kloof Gorge is part of the 4.47 square kilometres (1.73 sq mi) Krantzkloof Nature Reserve.*
>
> *"Kloof extends from the top of Field's Hill and borders Winston Park, Gillitts, Forest Hills and Hillcrest. These suburbs are collectively known as the Upper Highway Area or the Outer West region of Durban.*
>
> *"The M13 highway (built in the 1940s) intersects Kloof and on 16 June this forms part of the route of the annual Comrades Marathon, an approximately 90 kilometres (56 miles) ultra-marathon run between Pietermaritzburg and Durban since 1924."*
>
> [Wikipedia].

Durban, on the eastern (Indian) seaboard of South Africa, is one of the most picturesque cities in our country, if not indeed in the world. It is a city steeped in colonial history, Zulu wars and beautiful, lush, green rolling hills, famous for its sugarcane and magnificent *Valley of a Thousand Hills* panoramas.

While in Durban there are no exceptionally high mountains like Table Mountain in Cape Town (except for deeper into the province where the majestic *'Drakensberg Escarpment'* dominates) the city offers storybook landscapes directly from *Fantasia* ... a subtropical paradise of hills upon hills as far as the eye can see.

It is as fascinating, subtropical city, with hot, sultry summers and mild winters. It offers historic botanical gardens with ancient, massive trees, a state-of-the-art aquarium, lots of golf on picturesque courses, scenic drives, indigenous woodlands, wetlands, museums, sports, huge stadiums, a prolific birdlife, amusement parks, zoos and beautiful residential gardens.

My earliest memory of Durban was in 1951, when I, at the age of three, arrived at the Durban's Marine Parade (a beachfront-drive) with my family in a 1940s Morris Minor at about eight in the evening, with the Cuban Hat Restaurant decked in colourful lights and with huge waves pounding the rocks across the street.

At that age the novelty of life was still magic, and the Cuban Hat Restaurant is, more than six decades later, still there today making a killing among tourists on the Durban beachfront. A drive out to the 'Bluff' (at Warner Beach) and to the North Coast and the South Coast is a must.

Nevertheless, it so transpired that I had to travel to Durban from Pretoria one day to go and present a workshop for a client in the posh, scenic Pinetown area. One 'deplanes' at the King Shaka International Airport and then must drive the fifty kilometres or so through beautifully manicured sugarcane fields, green hills and pockets of wetlands down south to the city of Durban. How courteous of the city fathers to have moved the noise of the new international airport out of the heart of Durban.

Colourful houses and dwellings adorn the hills and the occasional Hindu temple can sometimes be spotted here and there. While some consider it a nuisance to have the airport situated so far away from the Durban CBD, most people probably consider it rather a blessing, as it has eliminated the typical annoying airport soundtrack that used to be the case with the old, decommissioned airport within a stone's throw (south) of the city.

The many conflicts of the 19th century between the British and the Zulus have been vigorously brought to life in 1965 by Donald R. Morris with his book, *The Washing of the Spears: The Rise and Fall of the Great Zulu Nation*. He writes:

> *"As the Napoleonic Wars were coming to a close, a petty native chieftain, whose clan numbered less than 1500 souls inhabiting an area perhaps ten miles on a side, started to forge a nation. When he was murdered twelve years later, he controlled 2 000 000 people inhabiting hundreds of thousands of square miles, and even larger areas had been totally depopulated by the ravages he had unwittingly initiated. So powerful was the monolithic political entity he created that it survived the mismanagements of two incompetent successors, and in 1878, fifty years after his death, its irresponsible power posed a considerable threat to the continued existence of the European civilization in its vicinity ... This then, is the story of the Zulu nation – of its rise under Shaka and its fall in the Zulu War of 1879."*
>
> [Morris: 14].

The city of Durban, indeed the entire province of KwaZulu-Natal, is steeped in history with such colonial battlefields as *Isandhlwana*, *Rorke's Drift* and *Ulundi;* as well as famous Voortrekker battle-sites such as *Blood River* and the iconic Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) battle-sites such as *Ladysmith*, *Spioenkop*, *Colenso* and many others cramming the KwaZulu-Natal map. This province is a real history-buff's paradise.

Nevertheless, during 2012 I was staying over in a quaint little guesthouse in the scenic 'Cowies Hill' area of Pinetown in Durban, just adjacent to the town (cum suburb) of 'Kloof'. This magnificent suburb of Cowies Hill also abounds with tropical plant-life, and, when it rained, resembles a typical Walt Disney-scene from Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book.* A consequence of my stay there was my falling-off from the veranda at the guesthouse (some sort of an annexe to the main mansion) into a little hedgerow of blooming rose-trees one morning. The host and a female guest eventually have had to pool forces and extricate me from those rose-trees where I lay prostrate on my back like a beached whale ... embarrassing (and excruciating).

Both Cowies Hill and Kloof are on the route for the legendary (annual) *Comrades* ultra-marathon (90 km) between Durban and Pietermaritzburg with Durban and Pietermaritzburg playing hosts to the marathon on the alternating uphill (Durban to Pietermaritzburg) and downhill (Pietermaritzburg to Durban) races respectively. Wally Hayward (1908-2006) has won the Comrades five times and finished the distance of 90 km in a race just before his 81st birthday in 1989. Bruce Fordyce (b.1955) has won the Comrades a record nine times. A former 100 km world record holder, Fordyce has also won the London-to-Brighton marathon three times in a row.

Nevertheless, to return from this digressing to sports, it would appear as if Durbanites are most keen, if it were possible, on living in Kloof, apparently the most sought-after suburb in Durban, like Sandton to the people of Johannesburg, Waterkloof to the people of Pretoria and Bishop's Court to the people of Cape Town.

So, while discussing the fascination of this suburb for Durbanites with our host (in his sleek guesthouse 'courtesy shuttle' one morning with which he dropped us off at work every day) and inquiring from him where the name 'Kloof' had originally come from, he turned to us at some point and, a little irked, remarked (my paraphrasing):

"Guys, 'Kloof' is supposed to be pronounced 'Kloof' (to rhyme with 'roof') and not 'Kloof' (to rhyme with 'whiff'). Although the word means 'gorge' in Afrikaans (after the ravine that runs through the suburb) and in that language must correctly be pronounced as 'Kloof' (to rhyme with 'whiff'), the locals here take offence when people pronounce it in that way. You must say 'Kloof' (to rhyme with 'roof')!"

"Okay! Great stuff ... thanks for reminding us!" we replied, embarrassed by our ignorance. Strange as it may seem, the initiated pronounce the word as *'Kloof'* (to rhyme with 'roof').

But then I started to wonder ... what about Cowies Hill, i.e., where our host's gorgeous guesthouse was located. Where did the name 'Cowies Hill', a suburb of Pinetown, originally come from? Now, I did later discover that 'Cowies Hill' was named after the farmer William Cowie who had had his farm *Buffelskop* ('Buffalo Head') there during the latter part of the 19th century. But this, the textbook-reply I really needed, was not the reply I got from my host; the reply from my host, after a few seconds of deep contemplation and retrospection, was:

"Cowies Hill is named 'Cowies Hill' because at the time of the deliberations on what name to give for the suburb, the name 'Kloof' was unfortunately already taken."

References

1. Britannica. *Donald R. Morris*. Online.
2. Britannica.co. *Zulu People.* Online.
3. Britannica.com. *Battle of Blood River*. Online.
4. Britannica.com. *Drakensberg/Mountain, Location & Facts*. Online.
5. Britannica.com. *Durban*. Online.
6. Britannica.com. *Durban/Marine Parade*. Online.
7. Britannica.com. *Pinetown/South Africa*. Online.
8. Britannica.com. *Rudyard Kipling*. Online.
9. Comrades.com. *Comrades Marathon/The Ultimate Race*. Online.
10. Fad.co.za. *The Cuban Hat/Facts About Durban.* Online.
11. Kzn.southcoast.com. *Warner Beach/Kwazulu-Natal South Coast*. Online.
12. Kznia.org.za. *Hindu Temples/Durban Buildings & Architecture*. Online.
13. Morris, Donald R. (1899) *The Rise and Fall of the Great Zulu Nation*. Sterling Pub Co Inc.
14. Oneearth.org. *Drakensberg Escarpment Savanna & Thicket*. Online.
15. SAmilitaryhistory.org. *Journal/A Glimpse of the Military History of Early Cowies Hill*. Online.
16. Sandtoncity.com. *Sandton City.* Online.
17. Shakespeare.org.uk. *William Shakespeare Biography*. Online.
18. Wikipedia. *Battle of Isandlwana*. Online.
19. Wikipedia. *Battle of Rorke's Drift.* Online.
20. Wikipedia. *Battle of Spion Kop*. Online.
21. Wikipedia. *Bishop's Court, Cape Town*. Online.
22. Wikipedia. *Bluff/Kwazulu-Natal*. Online.
23. Wikipedia. *Bruce Fordyce*. Online.
24. Wikipedia. *Cowies Hill.* Online.
25. Wikipedia. *Fantasia (1940 film).* Online.
26. Wikipedia. *King Shaka International Airport.* Online.
27. Wikipedia. *Kloof/Durban*. Online.
28. Wikipedia. *Kwazulu-Natal.* Online.
29. Wikipedia. *Ladysmith, Kwazulu-Natal*. Online.
30. Wikipedia. Military *History of South Africa*. Online.
31. Wikipedia. *Morris Minor*. Online.
32. Wikipedia. *Pietermaritzburg*. Online.
33. Wikipedia. *Shaka.* Online.
34. Wikipedia. *The Jungle Book (1967, 2016 films).* Online.
35. Wikipedia. *Valley of a Thousand Hills*. Online.

36. Wikipedia. *Wally Hayward*. Online.
37. Wikipedia. *Waterkloof*. Online.

34

Tomatoes & Onions

The majority of husbands remind me of an orang-utan trying to play the violin.
[Honorë de Balzac, 1799-1850].

When we first got married, my wife was a fashionable 18 and I a scrawny 30. The reason why I married so late probably was, as alluded to before, because I feared the bad girls and the good girls feared me, for a long time a hopeless 'Catch-22' situation. We got married in January 1978, just a few months after Elvis Presley had died.

They say a woman's first child is her husband, and I was no exception to the rule. My forgetfulness during the first few years of marriage was both inexhaustible and exhausting, to say the least. Misunderstandings thrived, and conversations, especially telephone conversations, were often rife with rash clumsiness.

This reminds me of a conversation my brother HansS. had had with my sister CorneliaS. about a fortnight ago, a good example of the type of conversations representative of our first years of marriage in 1978. They were speaking on the telephone, and she was asking my brother, who lives in with my sister and mother, to pick up some stuff at the grocery store that they were going to need the next day.

Sister CorneliaS: *"Hi HansS, could you perhaps pick up five apple-pies for me at the supermarket please?"*

Brother HanS: *"Yup! Only five?"*

Sister CorneliaS: *"Only five ... wait, perhaps we should make it four apple-pies and one doughnut. Betty is also going to be here, and I'm not sure if she will eat apple-pie."*

Brother HansS: *"Why don't I get five apple-pies plus a doughnut ... that way there can be no mistake."*

Sister CorneliaS: *"I cannot really say for sure that Betty won't eat apple-pie, but maybe we should get the apple-pie as well as the doughnut after all, as you say. O my, what if she won't like doughnuts too ... ?"*

One day, when I was getting ready for work at my firm, a large Iron & Steel manufacturer high up on the banks of the *Vaal River* (pronounce 'Vahl River'), my wife asked:

"Will you please get us some tomatoes and onions for tonight's dinner?" to which I replied in the affirmative.

When I arrived at home that afternoon, the first thing she asked was: *"Haven't you forgotten something?"*

"What?" I asked, surprised.

"The tomatoes and the onions!" she replied.

"Oh, sorry, I have completely forgotten ... I'll get it on the way home tomorrow afternoon!" I said. So, we went without the tomatoes and onions in that dinner.

When I arrived at work the following morning, the phone rang early and there was my wife.

"Sorry, I forgot to ask you to bring some bread and milk too."

"Okay. Will do." I replied. *"See you later."*

When I arrived at home that afternoon, my wife just took one good look at me and the parcel with groceries in my arms, and said:

"Haven't you forgotten something?"

"Like what?" I asked, while placing the tomatoes and onions on the kitchen table (This thing was beginning to get at me!).

"The bread and the milk I asked!" she said, exasperated.

"Oh, sorry. I must have forgotten! Listen, I'll get it tomorrow on the way home from work."

So, we went without the bread and the milk for that evening. The absent-mindedness and forgetfulness, however, was beginning to wear on my nerves. An acquaintance of ours once related the anecdote (somewhat embellished and exaggerated to make it more interesting) about the time he has had to go to the store for some tomatoes and onions for his wife. They were having a *braai* and South Africans are fond of (fried) tomato-and-onion relish on their *mieliepap. (corn-meal mush).*

When he arrived at the supermarket, they were having this big promotion on a special product going, and when he came around this one isle, there was this gorgeous blonde ... dressed only in a bikini and promoting the latest in suntan-oil. I stand to be corrected but he reportedly arrived at home with a bag full of all kinds of inconsequential stuff e.g., like a screwdriver and a bottle of suntan-oil.

"Maybe you should try a string around your finger, like people do in the fairy tales." my wife suggested.

"Maybe I should." I agreed, despondently. Those were still the 'good old days' when we were still so unhappy without cellphones and cellphone reminders. So, the next day, there I went, with a red string around my pinkie. I used to be great 'dreamer' as a child, and my worst nightmare usually was when I dreamed, it was where I had arrived at school in my pyjamas, or worse still, without my pants. Later, after I had finished my national conscription-duty for the army, the same dream would often recur but with a slight adaptation. This time I would arrive on the Monday-morning parade-ground unshaved and in a dishevelled condition with half of my uniform stolen and the other half in tatters.

Another actual experience of note (not a dream) was when I pitched up in a boardroom in Saldanha Bay, an important harbour on our West Coast thousands of miles from home, to present a workshop for a client. When I opened my laptop-case, the connection-cord was missing ... it was still lying in a boardroom at our head office in Johannesburg. These types of mistakes are typical of the unprofessional so-called 'corporate idiot'. So, I had to phone a guy in Bellville near Cape Town and beg him for his personal password to his desktop-computer to enable me

to access my slideshow, which I had fortunately backed up with a memory stick (flash-disk). The cable I had forgotten in our own corporate HQ boardroom, mind you, was in the meantime stolen ... I never got it back.

One of the most unforgivable 'forgetfulnesses' (I suppose) is when a mother forgets to buy a treat for her toddler in the supermarket, upon which the toddler then usually goes ahead and throws what in his species is considered the required regulation tantrum. We were sitting in a lecture one day when a worker, unacquainted with the English language, asked the lecturer what a 'tantrum' was. After providing the textbook-definition of a 'tantrum' (by the lecturer) a geologist by profession called PietL. interjected with a far better description of a tantrum (my 'enhanced' paraphrasing):

"A tantrum is an ear-splitting, nerve-shattering tactic of epic magnitude orchestrated by a small child that usually occurs suddenly and quite unexpectedly ... just before or beyond the cash-register."

Nevertheless, the following afternoon I went straight to the store, string around the pinkie, and this time not only got some tomatoes, onions, bread and milk, but some other stuff too, just 'in case'. I was taking no chances. I even double-checked just to make sure that this time I did not forget anything.

When I arrived at home, my wife just took one look at the grocery-parcels in my arms, gave me one of those reproachful looks and again asked, *"Haven't you forgotten something?"*

"Oh ... no ... not again! What is it this time?" I asked, completely at the end of my tether.

"Are you sure you did not remember?" she insisted.

"No, what on earth is it?"

"I honestly thought you'd remember!"

"Remember what?"

"Today is the 21st of January ... our anniversary?"

For the first time I fully understood: Another orang-utan trying to play the violin.

References

1. Britannica.com. *Elvis Presley*. Online.
2. Capetown.gov.za. *City of Cape Town*. Online.
3. Encyclopedia.com. *Iscor Limited*. Online.
4. Kidshealth.org. *Temper Tantrums/For Parents*. Online.
5. SA-austin.com. *Mieliepap Recipe/Delicious Side Dish*. Online.
6. Theculturetrip.com. *10 Reasons Why South African Braais Are Better Than BBQ's*. Online.
7. Westcoastway.co.za. *Top 21 Things to See in the Cape West Coast*. Online.
8. Westcoasway.co.za. *Langebaan/West Coast Way*. Online.
9. Wikipedia. *Bellville, South Africa*. Online.
10. Wikipedia. *Catch-22*. Online.
11. Wikipedia. *Honoré de Balzac*. Online.
12. Wikipedia. *Johannesburg*. Online.
13. Wikipedia. *Orangutan*. Online.
14. Wikipedia. *Saldanha Bay*. Online.
15. Wikipedia. *Vaal River*. Online.

35

The Bizarre World of Social Incongruence

The world is moving so fast these days that the man who says it can't be done is generally interrupted by somebody doing it.
[Elbert Hubbard, 1856-1913].

I don't know about you, but I find it hard to live with incongruence, a phenomenon defined as *'the exact opposite of agreement or harmony'.* [Oxford].

I have been battling with incongruence all my life and even the fact that our faces were not created symmetrical used to gall me at first, until someone showed me what symmetrical faces would have looked like in real life. Symmetrical faces look creepy, almost like some of those weird 'androids' in the movies. It comes across as completely phoney, artificial, and disingenuous. With a symmetrical face we probably would have looked much uglier (or much less attractive) than the case is today.

Take the case of my blue Vespa-scooter I had bought in the early 1970s when I was still in my twenties; who in his right mind buys a scooter with only 50cc capacity? It is a death-trap on wheels because of its lack of manoeuvrability in heavy traffic (By the way, have you also wondered why they call the slowest traffic of the day the 'rush hour'?). Nevertheless, I used that scooter for some time and eventually sold it after a farmhand one day had overtaken me on his dilapidated old tractor, the ultimate insult, on the road between Carletonville and Westonaria.

Take the case where I, on the one hand while preparing breakfast for years had battled to fry eggs without breaking the yolk, on the other hand, when I decided used to prepare scrambled eggs instead, simply could not break the yolk the first time around, and sometimes even had to invoke the powers of a fork plus a steak-knife with some vigorous stirring in order to break the yolk and stir a properly scrambled-egg (I never bother with eggbeaters because they are too cumbersome to clean). Fortunately. I eventually invented my own little fool-proof 'plumber's secret' on how to fry and egg without breaking the yolk in terms of the (highly suspect) 'necessity-is-the-mother-of-invention-principle'.

Take the strange case of the Englishman who, during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, was accosted on his farm in the Cape Province by a host of belligerents engaged in the war ... first the Boers and afterwards the 'Tommies' (British). A few hours after the ravenous Boers led by General Jan Smuts had arrived at his farm and demanded that he slaughter some animals, probably sheep, and prepare meals for the commando (as told by Deneys Reitz in his classic on the war, i.e., *Commando)* the famished Tommies also arrived and started the whole circus for slaughtering and food-preparation all over again. The exasperated and so-called 'neutral' colonial Englishman could do nothing but meekly acquiesce. His name? 'Mr. Guest'!

Take the strange case of my brother HansS. who arrived at school one day and had a comparatively complicated algebra equation and sum marked 'wrong' after we had assisted him all afternoon the previous day for him to get it right. After he had told us that the sum had not been marked personally by the maths-teacher, but by the entire class on the principle of 'majority opinion', we encouraged him to appeal the verdict and challenge the class's democratic (but obviously erroneous) answer. The upshot of that appeal was that my brother's answer was the only one that was right ... the entire rest of the class had had it wrong all the time instead. (So much for 'majority rule'!). The reader may think it strange, but this type of thing now happens every day on the political scene in 'democratic' South Africa.

Take the strange case of my brother ThysS. who with his family now live in Australia. In the community where they live, the householder is allowed by the City Council the right to put

unwanted goods, the type of obsolete and redundant paraphernalia that normally would have been sold in a garage-sale or something, out on the pavement or sidewalk of his front yard for passers-by to remove for their own benefit at no cost at all. This saves the householder the trouble of having to cart unsellable items away at his own expense (and trouble). The first time my brother availed himself of this very convenient facility by stacking the unwanted items neatly in proximity of his mailbox, he woke up the next morning to discover that the system had worked. The obsolete and redundant items were all, almost as if by some mystical oriental alchemy, miraculously removed ... and so was his brand-new mailbox.

Take the case (perhaps only an urban legend) of the wife who had ordered two large pizzas one day for dinner that evening with the in-laws. Then she phoned her husband and asked him to pick up the two pizzas after work. So, after work the husband drove over to the pizza joint and started inquiring about the pizzas, when a noisy altercation suddenly ensued after he had discovered that the pizzas were not even remotely ready yet ... worse still, the staff did not know anything about the arrangement at all. Eventually they discovered that the wife had used a phone number she had scribbled down from a 'Scooter's Pizzas' website, and not the one from the 'Roman's Pizzas' website. This could have been a costly mistake.

One day in (about) 1981, when I was still working at the big Iron & Steel Manufacturing Co. in Vanderbijlpark, I had to go to the Works-HQ about a two-hundred meters distance from our office. I then figured out that, since the road was such a long way around the gargantuan Plate Mill where they manufactured these special steel sheets for their customers, it would be easier if I could take a shortcut through the plot of land where the enormous steel-sheets lay spread-out to be marked with serial numbers, probably for inventory and invoicing purposes (so I thought).

I had no sooner taken my first two strides or I got stuck with my shoes clinging to the metal like bubble-gum. Those sheets were still piping hot and had been laid out for it to cool down at leisure. It was only then that I noticed that the workers who had been standing around on (and walking all over) the sheets so nonchalantly all the time were all issued with special-purpose shoes lined with wooden soles completely indifferent to the heat. I jumped off that sheet like a cat from a hot tin roof, very angry at my firm and its management ... where were the warning (safety) signs and the barricading for new milieu-disabled employees like me?

An amusing incident involves the late General Jan Smuts. Legend has it that nothing ever could have ruffled the indefatigable soldier, statesman, politician, amateur-botanist and philosopher. One day, during the 1914 South African rebellion, when pro-German Generals Christiaan De Wet, Koos de la Rey and Manie Maritz stood up against the government over the South African involvement with the British against the Germans in Southwest Africa (now Namibia), Generals Louis Botha, the prime minister at the time, and General Smuts were determined to quell the revolt as quickly and decisively as possible, which they also did in due time.

At one stage of the revolt, however, General Smuts' advisers admonished him not to travel to Potchefstroom in the Western Transvaal (today the Northwest Province), a hotbed of rebellion and sedition, apparently to deliver a speech with the purpose of appeasing the restive population. His advisers had reportedly warned:

> *"General Smuts, you must not go to Potchefstroom to deliver that speech ... it could be very, very dangerous. Please think it (the trip to Potchefstroom) over carefully."*

Apparently, he just nodded in affirmation. But, when the same advisers asked him later if he had contemplated their advice carefully, he nodded and said:

> *"Don't worry; I've have considered your advice carefully, very carefully."*

> *"And?"* they wanted to know.

"Well, I am now more convinced than ever that I must buy another bull for my cattle farm at Rooikop."

He was living a charmed life. What a pleasant surprise when the South African Broadcasting Corporation recently managed to broadcast an audio-clip from its archives dating from WW2 and the 1940s when Bing Crosby, actor and bestselling recording-artist of the record 'White Christmas', was congratulating 'Ouma Smuts' (Afrikaans for 'Granny Smuts') on her birthday directly and 'live' from his wartime-show in Hollywood.

References

1. Britannica.com. *Australia*. Online.
2. Britannica.com. *Boer/People*. Online.
3. Britannica.com. *Jan Smuts/South African Statesman*. Online.
4. Dictionaryapa.org. *Incongruence*. Online.
5. Familyhandyman.com. *The 30 Secrets a Plumber Won't Tell You*. Online.
6. National.archsrch.gov.za. *National Archives of South Africa*. Online.
7. Oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com. *Incongruity/Noun*. Online.
8. Reitz, Deneys 1930, 1950) *Commando: A Boer Journal of the Boer War.* Faber & Faber. 6th Edition or higher.
9. Researchgate.net. *The Public Life of Isie 'Ouma' Smuts, 1899-1945.* Online.
10. Salegion.org.uk. *'Ouma' Smuts*. Online.
11. Vespa.com. *Vespa Piaggio/Scooter.* Online.
12. Wikipedia. *Bing Crosby*. Online.
13. Wikipedia. *Carletonville*. Online.
14. Wikipedia. *Christiaan de Wet.* Online.
15. Wikipedia. *Commando.* Online.
16. Wikipedia. *Deneys Reitz*. Online.
17. Wikipedia. *Elbert Hubbard*. Online.
18. Wikipedia. *Hollywood*. Online.
19. Wikipedia. *Iscor*. Online.
20. Wikipedia. *Koos de la Rey*. Online.
21. Wikipedia. *Louis Botha.* Online.
22. Wikipedia. *Manie Maritz.* Online.
23. Wikipedia. *Maritz Rebellion*. Online.
24. Wikipedia. *Mittal Steel South Africa.* Online.
25. Wikipedia. *Necessity the mother of invention.* Online.
26. Wikipedia. *Northwest Province/South African province*. Online.
27. Wikipedia. *Potchefstroom*. Online.
28. Wikipedia. *Second Boer War*. Online.
29. Wikipedia. *South African Broadcasting Corporation*. Online.
30. Wikipedia. *Steel Mill*. Online.
31. Wikipedia. *Western Cape*. Online.
32. Wikipedia. *Westonaria*. Online.
33. Yourdictionary.com. *Tommies/Meaning*. Online.

36

Honesty is the Best Policy (Or is it?)

I have the most perfect confidence in your indiscretion.
[Sydney Smith, 1771-1845].

I was born into an honest, hard-working family and cannot remember one day in which I had to go hungry or during which I had seen either of my parents drunk, inebriated or violent. But, however, I admit that I was not a little surprised to hear from my mother that my father also had had his brushes with the law as a boy and young adult in his day.

As boys they used to roam the streets of Jeppe in Johannesburg, Randgate and Randfontein and all the West Rand on the Witwatersrand, engaging in all kinds of mischief, delinquency and mayhem, just for sports. Bear in mind that those were the days (the 1930s and 1940s) before the advent of television, cellphones or social media like Facebook, Twitter and e-mail etc. Young people in those days were subjected to the social pandemonium of migrating to the City of Gold, Johannesburg, where all kinds of evil, vice, iniquity and immorality, as a consequence of one of the most prodigious gold rushes in history, were rife.

They may have had radio and newspapers, but that was about it. At my father's funeral in 2013, my mother related with considerable nostalgia how my father and his friends used to heckle the police with all kinds of insufferable social outrages and then disappear into the woods embracing the little village of Randgate ... with the police hot on their tails.

Apparently, my father and his friend, VilletjieV., had developed this remarkable flair, when fleeing from the police, for enticing their pursuers into the deepest corner of a pair of tennis courts surrounded by a 15 ft. (diamond-mesh, chicken-wire) fence, and once cornered, only to nimbly scale the fence with the speed and agility of two gibbon monkeys, leaving the police aghast and forlorn behind.

Another one of their 'hobbies' was to run down the street and kick the bottom watermelon from its position where it stood stacked with other watermelons in front of the fruiterer's shop, upon which the entire stack of watermelons would mysteriously implode only for the entire lot to scatter helter-skelter into the street.

Be that as it may, I believe that humans are born with the facility to intuitively discern between right and wrong, truth and untruth. For instance, when I was four years old, I once engineered the theft of the property belonging to my neighbour, 'Joodjie' ('Little Jew'), by stealing his little toy-airplane through the wire-fence of their home adjacent to ours. To escape suspicion, however, I went and hid the 'hot' object for about two or three days until the anticipated hullabaloo had died down, after which I was going to retrieve my new acquisition and start enjoying it at leisure. Do the math: How on earth could I, as a four-year old, have gauged the gravity and immorality of my crime at that age to know to hide the stolen item for a few days for a 'cooling-off' period?

After the (self-imposed) designated 'cooling-off period' I, however, in the meantime had developed the strange, grave malady of this thing called a 'conscience', upon which 'stealer's remorse' mysteriously started kicking in with a holy and unforgiving revenge. Bear in mind that, at that stage and only four years old, I had not been enrolled in a Sunday School or any programme of religious training at all. I consequently took the toy and ditched it as unobtrusively as possible back into the Little Jew's (Joodjie's) backyard.

Afterwards, in later life, I also, like my friends, had fallen into the typical mischief and delinquency associated with the sixties, just like previous generations before us had done, so I also today have my own fair share of embarrassing skeletons in hindsight to mismanage. That

has nevertheless not prevented me from believing that humans know very well when they are doing wrong.

In 1950, when my father arrived at home with that little, black (1940s) 'Baby' Ford Prefect (see *How Not to Buy a Car)* we were elated. I was only three at the time and my father used to leave me and my best friend *Popeye*, a ragdoll my grandmother had made us and had left at our house for me to play with, inside the car while he would fiddle around in the engine. I was the only child at the time and did not have any siblings to play with yet.

One day, while my father was again fiddling in the car's engine, I got fascinated by the pretty little blue roof-light of the car. So, out of sheer curiosity, I started dismantling the little contraption and it was not very long until I had opened the cover and removed the little bulb from its casing. When my father eventually discovered my heinous crime, he gave me the regulation hiding appropriate for my age and the parental-guidance norms of the 1940s/1950s, but I nevertheless had felt quite affronted when he refused to accept my explanation to the effect that Popeye, the ragdoll, had broken the fixture. I mean, what has happened to the adage, *Innocent until proven guilty?* Has he personally observed me breaking the fixture? After that incident I solemnly decided to never trust grownups again.

Fraud and corruption in high places and match-fixing in sports etc. are rife all over the world, and South Africa has had its fair share of scandals. The fact is that humans were created with their eyes in the front of their heads for the simple reason those human relationships are based on the sacred principle of mutual trust. We can see in front of us but cannot see behind our backs, and we therefore unfortunately sometimes fall easy prey to criminals and crime, which was not supposed to have happened in the first place. Another less important reason for having our eyes in the front is, of course, to enable us to see where we are going, although not many people seem to avail themselves of this facility.

Adolf Hitler reportedly used to say that, when you lie, make sure you lie 'big'. With that philosophy he went on to conquer the hearts of Germany. The rest is history, and the upshot of his pernicious philosophy was that the Nazis have had to discover the hard way that one cannot establish a community and a society on lies, untruths, unfairness, injustice, hatred and deceit.

That, today, is patently obvious, and that is also how we are consequently taught. I mean, once you have told a lie, it becomes progressively harder to remember how one had previously lied, or to keep consistent records of all the lies to maintain the integrity of the charade. When one (in principle) however has the habit of consistently speaking the truth, he has nothing to worry about and to pathologically remember (or to painstakingly keep track of).

The problem is that when one starts growing up, the lines between truth vs. untruth, wrong vs. right, evil vs. good and ethical vs. unethical are inclined to sometimes become increasingly blurred. For instance, do you, dear reader, always tell the truth, without any exceptions at all? Is it really practicable or possible to always tell the truth?

The problem is that the phenomenon of diplomacy, whether informal between ordinary people, family and friends or formally between clients, customers, governments and politicians, would probably be impossible without the *bona fide* science of 'untruth'. Sometimes people simply lie to spare other people their feelings or to prevent rash and impetuous behaviour in some other party or protect privileged information and vested interests.

This thin line or tightrope between truth and untruth, and the way we deal with it, is called *discretion.* A person who lacks discretion and acts indiscreetly can wreak havoc between friends, organisations or countries. The knack or gift for discretion is an important requirement for anybody who wants to succeed socially or in business today. Even the Bible admonishes us to be discreet.

A friend of mine, already deceased, once bumped into a colleague in town, somebody he had not seen for years. After the greetings and the basic curtsies, they decided to grab a quick cup of

coffee and reminisce a little over the good old days when they used to work together. Then my friend put his foot in his mouth by asking something along the lines of (my paraphrasing):

"Whatever happened to old so-and-so, you know, the pathetic little secretary with the blue eyes who used to work for old so-and-so? You know ... the little ferret that always looked so hopelessly pale and anaemic!"

His former colleague replied:

"*O yes, I remember who you are referring to. Didn't I tell you? I married her!"*

Espionage would have been impossible without professional diplomacy, discretion ... and *blatant lies*. Did those decoys, smokescreens and distractions created by British radio-stations and secret agents during WW2, especially those in preparation for the D-Day invasion of Hitler's 'Fortress Europe' on 6 June 1944, really constitute 'lying'? Bear in mind that it was those 'lies' that helped the Allies win the war. Also, how will a P.O.W. (prisoner-of-war) ever escape if he were not allowed to tell lies and use deception with his enemies? Even King David (in the Bible) used deception to escape the wrath of his enemies; but, he did some other 'wrong' things too.

I believe in the Biblical injunction of not bearing false witness against my neighbour (Old Testament) and of not lying to my brother (New Testament). Having said this, however, it does not mean that we must injudiciously tell the truth all the time to all and sundry without any discretion at all. Those injunctions from the Scriptures not to lie were meant to encourage people to be a reliable witness in court or a respectable witness in civil disputes between parties, and to live a life based on relationships built on honesty and mutual trust, i.e., not to bear false witness.

There is, however, no way I will disclose to a Nazi-officer the whereabouts of my wife, husband, parent or child (or even a member of the Polish or French Resistance) when those fascist thugs were clearly hell-bent on a lethal witch-hunt for 'culprits'. Read Anne Frank's wartime *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *The Hiding Place* by Corrie Ten Boom and you will appreciate what I mean. Other books like *I Shall Bear Witness* by Victor Klemperer and *The Nightmare Years: 1930-1940* by William L. Shirer are also strongly recommended.

In his book, *Scourge of the Swastika*, Lord Russell of Liverpool relates the story of how in Russia, during WW2, the SS walked into a farmhouse one day and, after they had failed to get valuable information from its perturbed and terrified inhabitants, murdered the entire family in cold blood, in the process and probably also out of pure and naked malice, nailing the little three-year old toddler (live) through his hands and feet to the wooden post of the fence-gate, leaving him there at the mercy of the elements and predators to die.

What kind of a soldier, no matter how devout and dedicated, would commit such a dastardly deed unless he is the epitome of immoral depravity? In an ugly, urban dialect: Such brutality deserves no honesty and no truth from nobody of no kind at no time never. As alluded to earlier, even King David (from the Old Testament) once feigned madness (i.e., he told a 'lie') to save his own skin.

> *"And David laid up these words in his heart and was sore afraid of Achish the king of Gath. And he changed his behaviour before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard. Then said Achish unto his servants, Lo, ye see the man is mad: wherefore then have ye brought him to me? Have I need of mad men, that ye have brought this fellow to play the mad man in my presence? shall this fellow come into my house?"*
>
> [1 Samuel 21:12-15KJV].

The most heartbreakingly honest man I had ever heard of was the anecdote about a derelict of a drunk who had been given the final ultimatum by his wife: *"I've had enough of your nonsense; you'll have to choose between me and the liquor!"* to which the drunk reportedly replied: *"Better you choose ... I may just make the wrong choice!"*

The worst form of betrayal is when people start lying to themselves. A friend of mine, who had been in denial about his beer-consumption for years, said to us the other day: *"I suddenly woke up one morning and there I was ... fat!"*

The worst form of self-betrayal I have seen was when a guy I used to work with at the steel-mill, JohnnyM., and I one day decided to walk over to the plant-cafeteria for a bite to eat. So, there we were, aiming to cross the road at this zebra-crossing when I noticed one of those mammoth 18-wheeler 'ribbed' trucks (or something akin) approaching the crossing, fully loaded, at a reduced, i.e., legal but still considerably lethal speed. I instinctively stepped back onto the pavement (sidewalk) but JohnnyM. just kept briskly walking, right into the face of the oncoming truck. This caused some considerable inconvenience to the driver of the truck, as he suddenly has had to gear down and break with great mechanical flamboyance and hydraulic fanfare ... only to have to pull away again laboriously ten seconds later. When I asked JohnnyM. if he was not scared while reminding him that that monstrous truck could have easily run him over, he replied:

"Why should I be scared? I already was a few yards into the zebra-crossing and had right-of-way ... I did nothing wrong! Besides ... had he run me over it would all have been his fault, not mine."

This, incidentally, was the era when I used to work at Iscor in Vanderbijlpark in the Industrial Engineering (Organisation & Methods) department and where the General Works Manager, Mr. JohnR., later were to announce the launch of management's concerted campaign to improve productivity in the plant through accelerated technological innovation comprising the South and North Works of Iscor in that riverside town. Great was his consternation, however, when the General Works Manager arrived at the plant one sunny morning with a huge and colourful banner across the road grazing the entrance to the office block, which read:

WORK SMATA NOT HADA!

'Work smata not hada' was the local (satirical) African vernacular for the English, '*Work smarter not harder!'* and he, an intrepid managerial veteran still from the 'old school', reportedly stared at the banner, incredulous and with apparently taking a solemn oath to put this monstrous travesty right poste haste. Just imagine: *"Work smata not hada!" ...* how vulgar. A few days later, when the thousands of workers arrived at the factory, what did they see? The banner had been changed, overnight, as follows:

WORK SMATA AND HADA!

References

Britannica.com. *Sydney Smith.* Online.
Wikipedia. *Jeppestown.* Online.
Wikipedia. *Witwatersrand Gold Rush.* Online.
Wikipedia. *Sunday School.* Online.
Wikipedia. *Conscience.* Online.
Wikipedia. *Ford Prefect.* Online.
Wikipedia. *Popeye.* Online.
Britannica.com. *Adolf Hitler.* Online.
Britannica.com. *Germany.* Online.

Wikipedia. *Bible.* Online.
Macmillandictionary.com. *Discretion/Noun.* Online.
Wikipedia. *BBC.* Online.
Britannica.com. *World War II.* Online.
Wikipedia. *Normandy Landings*. Online.
History.com. *D-Day/Invasion, Facts & Significance*. Online.
Wikipedia. *Fortress Europe/Festung Europa*. Online.
Wikipedia. *Prisoner of War*. Online.
Myjewishlearning.com. *Fourteen Things You Need to Know About King David*. Online.
Wikipedia. *Old Testament*. Online.
Wikipedia. *New Testament.* Online.
Wikipedia. *Nazism*. Online.
Britannica.com. *Warsaw Uprising/Polish Resistance WW2*. Online.
Britannica.co. *The Resistance of France WW2*. Online.
Wikipedia. *Anne Frank*. Online.
Wikipedia. *Corrie ten Boom*. Online.
Wikipedia. *Victor Klemperer*. Online.
Wikipedia. *William L. Shirer*. Online.
Wikipedia. *Edward Russell, 2nBaron Russell of Liverpool.* Online.
Wikipedia. *Russia*. Online.
Lord Russell of Liverpool, Edward, 2nb Baron (1954) *Scourge of the Swastika*. Cassell.
Wikipedia. *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl.* Online.
Britannica.com. *Diary of a Young Girl/Anne Frank*. Online.
Ten Boom, Corrie & Sherrill, John & Elizabeth (1971) *The Hiding Place.* Chosen Books, Revell/Washington, Connecticut.
Klemperer, Victor (1998) *I Shall Bear Witness, 1933-1941.* Weidenfeld & Nicolson. London.
Shirer, William L. (1992) *The Nightmare Years, 1930-1940*. Bantam.

37

The End of an Era

The so-called lessons of history are for the most part the rationalisation of the victors. History is written by the survivors.
[Dr. Samuel Johnson, 1709-1784].

In 1960, when I was about twelve years old, my father and his friend, NaasS., came to us, i.e., my friend NaasS. (Jr.) and me, with a proposition to earn some pocket money. The job entailed the herding of some cattle and taking them on foot from a farm about 15 kilometres (about 9.3 miles) north of the little mining village of Blyvooruitzicht, to another friend, BarneyB.'s smallholding ('plot') near our home in Randgate, about an hour's drive in a 1950s Morris Minor 1000 cc.

Upon the sound of the name 'BarneyB.', I was sort of hooked immediately, as his name had the effect of conjuring up all kinds of memories of love and romance in my young schoolboy heart. You see, there was a time earlier in that year that I was hopelessly in love with his daughter, LorreleiB., as we had met for the first time when my father took me along to their smallholdings one Saturday morning to help them with the slaughtering of a cow.

The adults had to confront and shoot the poor cow, noisily and vociferously objecting to the uncivil treatment they were meting out to her and who have had to shoot the poor cow about four times in the head with a .22 small-calibre rifle before it succumbed to the volley of bullets. That event single-handedly put me off hunting and slaughtering for life.

So infatuated, however, had I been with this girl that I actually had gone down to the waterfront of the charming, wooded lake near our home and carved our initials ('PS Loves LB') on the bark of a huge eucalyptus tree with an Elvis ballad, *'Doing the Best I Can'* (from the movie *G.I. Blues)* drifting lazily on the wind toward me from the municipal swimming-baths loudspeakers across the lake.

If that eucalyptus tree is still standing their today, fifty-four years later, although I doubt it, that carving would probably be thirty metres up in the sky. Even in those days the carvings of my father and his pals had made decades earlier during the 1930s and 1940s when they were still schoolboys could then be reached only by climbing high up into the trees, provided one had known which tree to scale.

It also so happened that that girl was NaasS. Jr's 'kys' (pronounced 'case') at the time. In other words, they were an 'item'. So, another school-friend of ours, PieterM. (pronounced 'Peter') in whom I had confided the presence and location of my lovesick carving then went straight to NaasS. (Jr) and told him about it.

One afternoon, after we had 'debussed' form the rickety old Greyhound bus that transported us to school, I could see that everything was not well with NaasS. (Jr.), as he appeared quite pale and jaundiced around the jowls. After we had walked a few paces, and after the bus had gone, NaasS. (Jr.) suddenly turned to me, stuck his finger under my nose and said: *"You stay away from my girl!"*

With that he slapped me through the face with a force that made me flinch. It must be borne in mind that my assailant at the time (1960) was three years older (and bigger) than I, so all I could get out was what could today only perhaps be described as the 'Afrikaans' equivalent of the typical colonial, " *Yes Bwana! Sorry Bwana!"*

I, however, got my sweet revenge not much later when my mother's baby-sister, JeanetteG., a real Debbie Reynolds look-alike (remember *Tammy?)* at twelve and affectionately known as 'Nettie', came from Cottesloe in Johannesburg to visit us for the school-holidays and with my

erstwhile assailant, NaasS. (Jr.) falling hook, line and sinker for her. One afternoon, while we strolled to his house through the back-alley that used to connect the houses in Randgate in those days, he confided in me: *"I'm crazy about Nettie ... you can have LorreleiB. for all I care!"*

On her turn, however, Nettie later confided to me: *"NaasS. (Jr.) is okay, but GawieR. (Naas S. Jr.'s cousin), is the better kisser!"* The upshot of all that small-town romance melodrama was that, neither did NaasS. (Jr.) marry Nettie, and nor did I marry LorreleiB. We had been two juvenile dogs snarling and fighting over other peoples' 'bones' all the time. Sadly, Nettie, a lifelong childhood friend from the late 1940s through the 1990s, succumbed to cancer during the 1990s after many years of struggle against the insidious disease.

Anyway, an hour's drive in a Morris 1000cc in those days meant about thirty-five or forty or so miles, about 56 to 64 kilometres ... a considerable distance for two young boys to herd cattle in, bearing in mind that NaasJr. was 15 and I was 12 years old at the time. *"You'll do it in a jiffy ... and what's more, we'll pay each of you R8.*^{00}*!"* my father insisted. That amount, about half-a-dollar at the time, wouldn't even pay for a packet of bubble-gum today, but we were hopelessly too naïve and gullible at the time to have realised that those were slave-labour rates, although, even had I known, I probably would still have acquiesced. In those days, kids, especially those from the neighbouring farms, usually were expected to that type of thing for their families without reward anyway ... maybe we should have considered ourselves lucky for the privilege to be 'abused'.

On the day of the drive, we all assembled on the farm in question, a place with a derelict farmhouse and an equally derelict farmer whose lack of teeth and/or dentures elicited an anxious look from us as children. My mother, who apparently had been acquainted with this farmer, always used to say that looking into this man's open mouth when he spoke or laughed was like looking down an old, dark and decommissioned mineshaft. We nevertheless left with our charge, a large herd of cattle, at about 7am in the morning. Fortunately, our fathers had arranged some professional help in the person of an experienced cattle-herder, a courteous old black farmhand well-acquainted with farming-chores and sporting impeccable manners (his type always did).

We travelled over many miles of dirt-road, having a field time preventing the cattle of straying into the roadside-bush to graze. That was apart from the threat of oncoming traffic, fortunately still not a frequent sight on that portion of the route. At the 'neck' in the mountain, an area that some people perhaps would more aptly describe as a 'saddle-back', we had to steer the cattle over the meandering dirt-road through thick indigenous woods of thorn-trees and other endemic acacias embellished by deep *dongas* (ravines) and large boulders and rocks, the same spot where I, many years later in 1968, at the age of 21, was to retreat to for three lonely days and dark, Stygian nights in the bush, no light, no fire, trying to mourn and wish a lost love away.

Eventually, late that morning with the sun already high in the sky and bearing unrelentingly down upon us, we at last arrived at the little mining-village and pit-stop of Blyvooruitzicht. In earlier days my father used to work on the mines in this vicinity, so we were well acquainted with the region. In Blyvooruitzicht we lost a lot of time extracting recalcitrant cattle from folks' gardens where they had discovered a scrumptious buffet of ... flowers. Pansies were their favourite, but the housewives and/or domestic servants were understandably livid.

We then crossed a large stretch of rough and robust countryside that took us many hours to traverse, and the few little calves were beginning to whine, whimper and succumb to exhaustion. By this time, it was already past midday and blisteringly hot. Our fathers were conveniently following in their truck behind us, trying to keep to negotiable terrain with their vehicle, while all the way monitoring our progress. One little calf, the smallest in the herd, by now had to be 'airlifted' into my father's truck, but the rest had to simply hang in there and keep on slogging. We were beginning to succumb to fatigue ourselves, and although we were clamouring for rest, it was not forthcoming. It was a race against time, lest we be caught by the dark.

We eventually arrived at Bank, a decrepit little settlement comprising only a few houses, a small Indian community and a small mosque for the Indian community in the area. I drive past that spot now and then whenever I am in the region and today, sixty years later, this little community have now completely disappeared. The little mosque, that in terms of the faith of Islam are not allowed to be disassembled, imploded or removed whenever a town or village is abandoned, had fallen into ruins overgrown with weeds.

Late in the afternoon of that day, just beyond the little village of Bank, the herd got stuck in a marshland of reeds, water and mud. Most of the cattle eventually passed successfully through the quagmire but one rather large cow unfortunately got dead-stuck. By 8pm that evening we were still busy trying to extract the cow from the quagmire, and we only succeeded after our fathers had tied a rope to the rear bumper of the small truck and pulled out the cow by winding and tying the rope around her body. By then we were dog-tired, having been on the road driving the herd without rest or any hope for a temporary respite ceaselessly for fourteen hours. Luckily our mothers decided to put their foot down and, at that juncture, refused for us to continue any farther.

The fathers then arranged with the experienced black man, an indefatigable warrior of hundreds, if not thousands, of such 'rodeos', to continue single-handedly on his own. They would still tail him in the truck, but my friend and I would leave for home with our mothers who had earlier arrived at the scene with the equally indefatigable little Morris Minor.

When we arrived at home about forty-five minutes later, I dropped into my bed, deadbeat. The irony is that our fathers never paid us the promised 'going rate' of R8 for the job. It not only made me feel chagrined but also humiliated ... have they decided not to pay us for 'abandoning' the project at Bank? I carried that resentment about our 'forfeited pay' around with me for quite some time.

One recompense was that sometime later, while I was walking and playing in the woods surrounding the picturesque lake not far from our house, I, as mentioned earlier, stumbled upon what appeared to be a stolen Raleigh-bicycle, for it was craftily hidden away and covered with bushes and shrubs. I decided to do what was right and took the bicycle to the police station in Randfontein right away, fearing for my arrest any minute. After all, if the theft had already been reported, I could be arrested as the main culprit in the story. My fears, however, were totally unfounded for I arrived at the police station fifteen minutes later unmolested by the long arm of the law.

About three months later I received a letter-of-notification from the police station to the effect that the stolen item had not been claimed by its rightful owner and that I was free to come and claim the bicycle as my property. The only thing that marred that otherwise heart-warming day was the agonising screams emanating from the back-office of the police station (where I had gone to pick up the bicycle, and the same station where my father and his school pals have also received their lashes years ago for their unlawful schooldays antics) while a man was in the process of receiving the regulation six 'lashes' with a 'light cane', probably for some petty crime committed somewhere. Corporal-punishment was still legal in our justice system in those days.

I have nevertheless learned an important lesson during this cattle-herding event. As Bing Crosby intimated to Grace Kelly in the film *High Society*, the art of life is for people to have a heart and appreciation for 'human frailty'; if I could not abundantly forgive my father his 'human frailties', how can I expect my children to one day forgive me my many human frailties?

Fortunately, the cattle-herding story had a positive sequel later, for my father eventually more than amply rewarded me for my loss of the lousy R8 when he had delivered to our home in 23 Sauer Street, Randgate one of the grooviest of wooden school-desks during the early 1960s. That little desk, sixty-two years old this year, none the worse for wear, still adorns a room in my house today, and it probably will be left to my eldest grandson when I eventually finally depart.

References

1. Britannica.com. *Afrikaans Language*. Online.
2. Britannica.com. *Elvis Presley*. Online.
3. Britannica.com. *Eucalyptus*. Online.
4. Britannica.com. *Samuel Johnson*. Online.
5. Dictionary.com. *Bwana/Definition & Meaning*. Online.
6. SAHistory.org.za. *Indian South Africans*. Online.
7. Wikipedia. *Bing Crosby*. Online.
8. Wikipedia. *Blyvooruitzicht*. Online.
9. Wikipedia. *Cottesloe, Johannesburg*. Online.
10. Wikipedia. *G.I. Blues (film)*. Online.
11. Wikipedia. *Grace Kelly*. Online.
12. Wikipedia. *Greyhound Bus Lines*. Online.
13. Wikipedia. *High Society (1956 film)*. Online.
14. Wikipedia. *Human History*. Online.
15. Wikipedia. *Morris Minor*. Online.
16. Wikipedia. *Mosque*. Online.
17. Wikipedia. *Randfontein*. Online.
18. Wikipedia. *Stygian*. Online.

38

Dancing in the Clouds

Tell me about your yourself – your struggles, your dreams, your telephone number.
[Peter Arno, 1906-1968].

I grew up a great lover of music, and my childhood usually was brimming with opportunities to listen to music. Although my wife (organist) and I (pianist) spent the greater part of our adult life playing hymns and providing accompaniment to singing groups in church, I did not grow up in a cloister either.

The period of, say 1974 to 2012, when we sort of 'retired' from popular music, was the age of specialization, so our focus for four decades was on the category 'sacred music', so I never really got round to developing a decent repertoire of the other secular music I so much enjoyed. I suppose that, unlike many of my compatriots I consider all good, edifying music, provided the lyrics did not suggest any kind of immorality, profanity or blasphemy, as sacred anyway.

I was fairly acquainted with the iconic composers of the time, like Cole Porter, Jerome Kern, Irving Berlin, Sydney Romberg, Rodgers & Hammerstein, Elmer Bernstein, and Lerner & Loewe etc. I loved musicals like e.g., *Deep in My Heart*; *The Al Jolson Story*; *The Benny Goodman Story*; *The Glenn Miller Story*; *The Eddie Duchin Story*; *Singing in the Rain*; *Country Girl*; *Oklahoma*; *Easter Parade*; *State Fair*; *White Christmas*; *High Society*; *The Pyjama Game*; *Teacher's Pet*; *There's No Business Like Show Business*; *My Fair Lady*; *The Sound of Music*; *Lovely to Look At; State Fair; A Star Is Born* etc.

Songs from musicals that used to charm me off my feet were such numbers as, *When I Grow Too Old to Dream* (Sydney Romberg); *Its A Grand Night for Singing* (Rodgers & Hammerstein) and *White Christmas* (Irving Berlin); *Easter Parade* (Irving Berlin); *True Love* (Cole Porter); *I Could Have Danced All Night* (Lerner & Loewe); *The Sound of Music* (Lerner & Loewe) etc.

Incidentally, I considered Fred Astaire a more graceful (but not necessarily 'better') dancer than Gene Kelly, as Gene Kelly was a little bit too athletic in built. I liked to watch Danny Kaye, so memorable in *White Christmas* (and the comedy-thriller *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*, dance even more. I was much surprised to learn that Ann Miller, who played 'Nadine Hale', danced all her numbers in the 1948-musical *Easter Parade* for all practical purposes recuperating from a broken back after her boyfriend had shoved her down a staircase. Well, it had apparently begun to recover, and she has had to dance all her numbers propped-up with the aid of a medical prosthesis. That was one remarkable achievement.

Nevertheless, it so happened that, during the early 1970s, I decided that it was high time for me to learn to dance properly, and, in the absence of a formal school-of-dancing in Carletonville, I finally settled for the gruelling drive of about 80 kilometres to Johannesburg every Thursday-evening to attend my lesson at the ungodly hour of 10pm. at the Arthur Murray Studios.

At the studios we 'new conscripts' (rookies) were first introduced to the *waltz*, the *fox-trot* and the *quick step*. Soon we had also progressed to the *cha-cha*, the *rumba,* and the *samba* ... I was really beginning to enjoy the dancing, regardless of all the toes and corns of trainers I had been stepping on in the meantime. In those days I used to be painfully shy, and the dancing was serving the beneficial purpose of helping me to relax and develop some 'poise' (to enhance my general 'comportment' and 'demeanour') in formal social settings, which reminds me of the woman who one day had grumbled that, the more beer her husband imbibed, 'demeanour' he became.

I never, however, really got round to dances like the *tango*, the *paso doble* and other of the more advanced items. You see, it so transpired that, to relieve some of the monotony of the long trip to Johannesburg every Thursday-evening after work, I one day invited my brother HansS.,

my friend GerritV. and my mother's kid brother, FrikkieG. (Who had been living with us at the time), to accompany me to the lesson.

When we arrived in Johannesburg late that evening, my companions excused themselves on the pretext that they were going to do some 'window-shopping' and explore that side of the city while I was attending my lesson, as they did not see their way clear to attend anything (as uninvolved spectators) as boring and old-fashioned as ballroom-dancing. We thus parted ways at the entrance to the studios with the understanding that we were to rendezvous again at 11 p.m. after my lesson had finished.

Well, the rest, as they say, is history. What happened was that the trio must have strayed, out of curiosity, into a derelict old apartment-block, still in use but long past its 1930s prime and glory. When they reached the top of the stairs, they decided to try and access the roof of the building to secure a panoramic view of Johannesburg, the City of Gold, at night. They did succeed in accessing the roof of the building all right, for when I emerged from my dancing-lesson an hour later, they were already waiting for me at the car ... dazed, dishevelled, traumatized and standing there like the 'Three Stooges' applying for a job at the local mortuary.

What transpired was that, on the roof of that building, they apparently eventually had walked straight into a dozing night-watchman armed with a heavy wooden 'kierie' (Afrikaans: 'club') and when he saw them, had jumped up and started beating the daylights out of them, taking them for intruders and burglars, which reminds me of the anecdote about the pygmy from Africa who allegedly bragged that he had once killed an elephant armed only with his club. When asked how big his 'club' was, he reportedly proudly replied: *"Three-hundred members!"*

In the car my companions moaned and groaned all the way home, reproaching the inconsiderate night-watchman for attacking them so 'unprovoked'. The poor fellow probably was only doing his job and must have been terrified and fearing for his life in the face of his three unknown assailants insinuating themselves like that into his precinct in the dark at 10:30pm. at night. I could, however, understand their outrage at the attack ... imagine the insolence of an outnumbered nightwatchman so treacherous that he dared to defend himself against his 'assailants'.

References.

1. Bennygoodman.com. *Benny Goodman*. Online.
2. Britannica.com. *Cole Porter*. Online.
3. Britannica.com. *Glenn Miller*. Online.
4. Britannica.com. *Irving Berlin*. Online.
5. Britannica.com. *Jerome Kern*. Online.
6. IMDb.com. *Deep in My Heart (1954 film)*. Online.
7. IMDb.com. *Gene Kelly*. Online.
8. RodgersandHammerstein.com. *Rodgers & Hammerstein*. Online.
9. Wikipedia. *Danny Kaye*. Online
10. Wikipedia. *Easter Parade (1948 film)*. Online.
11. Wikipedia. *Eddie Duchin Story*. Online.
12. Wikipedia. *Elmer Bernstein*. Online.
13. Wikipedia. Fred Astaire. Online.
14. Wikipedia. *My Fair Lady (1964 film)*. Online.
15. Wikipedia. *Peter Arno*. Online.
16. Wikipedia. *Sydney Romberg*. Online.
17. Wikipedia. *The Benny Goodman Story*. Online.
18. Wikipedia. *The Glenn Miller Story*. Online.
19. Wikipedia. *The Jolson Story*. Online.
20. Wikipedia. *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty (1947 film)*. Online.
21. Wikipedia. *The Sound of Music (1965 film)*. Online.
22. Wikipedia. *The Three Stooges*. Online.
23. Wiktionary. *Kierie*. Online.

39

Facing the Mighty Gates of Rustenburg

Young men are apt to think themselves wise enough,
as drunken men are apt to think themselves sober enough.
[Lord Chesterfield, 1694-1773].

A few decades ago, when spaghetti-westerns and other adventure-movies from Italy were still so much in vogue, South Africa's (British-born) body-builder, Reg Park (b.1927) and in life a personal friend of Arnold Schwarzenegger (b.1947) of *The Terminator* fame, in his heyday had made a total of five Italian 'sword-and-sandal' films (remember 'Hercules Unchained'?) and is on record as the second man to bench-press 227 kg. (500 lbs.) after Doug Hepburn. The current world-record for the bench-press is 616 lbs. (280 kg.), held by Pat Casey. The silver screen's most graceful 'Tarzan', Gordon Scott and Steve Reeves (Hercules) both died in 2007 at the age of 81, and Reg Park also died aged 80 on 22 November 2007 in Johannesburg, South Africa from *metastatic melanoma*, a form of skin cancer.

As children we used to be very fascinated by 'strongman-movies', and my first Tarzan-film ever was in 1956, starring Lex Barker following up on the iconic Johnny Weismuller. Thereafter Gordon ('Werschul') Scott appeared on the scene. It was only much later that I learned that Johnny Weismuller, an ex-Olympian swimming-champion, originally had made Edgar Rice-Burroughs' Tarzan-films the household name that it was.

I must admit, however, that I find the anatomical 'caricaturizing' of the body-building sport by those monstrous, out-of-proportion bodybuilders nowadays is distasteful to the extreme, to say the least. I prefer the good old days when 'proportion' was still an important goal, with men like John Grimek, Steve Reeves, Gordon Scott, Reg Park and Dave Draper still serving as good examples (in print) from that era. I remember Frank Zane particularly not only for his magnificent definition, but also for the fact that he had a doctorate in mathematics (So much for the so-called 'dumb' bodybuilder). Like the joke about the bodybuilder who complained to a friend in the gym: "*They say we bodybuilders use only one-quarter of our brain!*" upon which the friend replied: *"What do they say we do with the other quarter?"*

Although I have never been a bodybuilder myself, I have nevertheless been fooling around intermittently in gyms for years. So, one day in 2007, in the Northwest Province and at a city called Rustenburg (reportedly at the time the fastest growing town in the southern hemisphere) I was scheduled to present a safety-workshop at Anglo-Platinum's 'Bafokeng Rasemone Platinum Mine' (BRPM) thirty-seven kilometres outside Rustenburg, just beyond the little village of Phokeng en route to Sun City. I was staying over in a guesthouse in Rustenburg and was planning to drive to the mine at 5 O 'Clock the next morning. Theoretically, one could drive the 37 kilometres to the mine in about half-an-hour, but in the 'rush-hour', when all vehicles move at a snail's pace, that half-an-hour could develop into two hours, hence my decision to leave early.

Bear in mind that, in South Africa, many motorists drive like insane maniacs gone berserk, and I am not necessarily saying it only satirically. In fact, in 2017 South Africa was voted the worst country in the world for drunk driving by Forbes Magazine. Many drivers, especially those in the passenger-transport sector, are also known for driving under the influence of 'dagga' (marijuana) allegedly to combat long-haul fatigue. Once, when I asked a man why he smoked dagga, a well-known hallucinatory drug in South Africa, he replied that in his culture it is believed that smoking dagga makes one more intelligent. That left me even more perplexed than before ... after all, if smoking dagga really did make one 'more intelligent' as they alleged, why were they still smoking it?

It was nothing strange to be pushed off that notoriously dangerous single-lane road by other vehicles, especially busses, not interested in keeping to the speed limit or any other traffic-rules at all. At Phokeng, a thriving little village today sporting one of the many 2010 Soccer World Cup stadiums, the motorist is faced with the daunting proposition of about eight to nine stops on a three-kilometre route through the village. It thus came as no small relief when one was being pursued by a huge truck hellbent on driving through the village without stopping at all, a practice that 'fortuitously' made stopping for the pintsized motorist in front virtually impossible and thus conveniently unnecessary.

I was favourably impressed with the modest little guesthouse in Rustenburg and commended the host on his fine collection of books available for visitors to read. I was especially impressed with his magnificent encyclopaedia on the Second World War, a set of beautiful, heavy and glossy black volumes embossed with lush gold-lettering on a red background.

So, on the first morning of my working day I rose at about 4:15am and got ready to drive out to the mine). The RBN ('Royal Bafokeng Nation') has an involvement with the platinum-mining industry in South Africa which is an interesting one:

> *"The Bafokeng tribe (Bafokeng meaning 'People of the dew', or 'People of the grass') own a piece of land in South Africa's bushveld on which 150 000 people, not all ethnic Bafokeng, live. Oral tradition suggests that when they settled in the Rustenburg valley, it captured heavy overnight dew, holding the promise that the land would be fertile and hence that the community would prosper. The Bafokeng struggled to buy the land, repelling invaders and imperialists as they did so.*
>
> *"About 100-150,000 ethnic Bafokeng live in an area some 150 km north-west of Johannesburg, South Africa, with the balance scattered primarily throughout South Africa. The Royal Bafokeng Nation (RBN) has retained its unique cultural identity and traditional leadership structures and is led by a hereditary Kgosi (king), currently Kgosi Leruo Molotlegi.*
>
> *"In 1925 the world's largest deposits of platinum group metals, such as platinum, rhodium and palladium were discovered on Bafokeng lands. Mining companies now pay royalties to the RBN in exchange for the right to mine these metals. Also, a court settlement in 1999 with Impala Platinum Mining (Implats), the second-largest platinum company in South Africa, gave the RBN a 22 percent royalty on all platinum taken from their territory and an ownership stake in Implats. The value of the Bafokeng's stake in Impala had tripled to more than $50 million by 2001. The Bafokeng receive annual royalties of approximately $63 million from platinum mining.*
>
> *"The RBN has established a sovereign wealth fund, Royal Bafokeng Holdings, an investment entity in Johannesburg, which is responsible for overseeing the growth and maintenance of the community 's income streams. It is considered to be Africa's most progressive community investment model, with total assets under management at approximately $4 billion. The RBN has invested royalties and dividends in a number of projects, and in civic administration and social services."*
>
> [Wikipedia].

So, after I have loaded my training paraphernalia, i.e., laptop-computer, training manuals etc. into my car, I walked toward the exit of the guesthouse to open the gates in the scant light. Visibility was extremely poor, and I just barely could make out the outlines of the heavy gates in front of me. I had earlier correctly assumed that, as my host had not given me any remote-control device for the gate, it was not electronically operated.

Now, normally when gates were electronically operated, the contemporary practice is to install one large single gate that slides to-and-fro on a track as one solid unit, either toward the right or toward the left. When gates are not electronically operated and had been installed as two separate

halves, those gates were likely to be opened manually in the old, traditional way, i.e., by swinging it open on well-oiled hinges, either toward the outside or the inside of the premises.

So, I walked up toward the two 'halves' of the gate, opened the little latch that kept the gates intact and, gripping it firmly by the heavy 'square tubing' metal construction, commenced to swing it inwards toward the inside the premises, only it did not want to budge. I tried again ... no luck. I then tried to swing it outwards toward the outside of the premises, but no luck either. I was now beginning to waste time; I simply had to go, come hell or high water, or I would run late for my 8am appointment. When the gates for a third time refused to budge, I gripped it with the fury of a wannabe Hercules on steroids and simply forced it open with some superhuman strength and resolve. This time it yielded, but I had to admit under some considerable protest.

It was at this junction where the gates decided to jump completely off their tracks, and I finally discovered with a shock that the gates, although installed as two halves, were installed to slide to-and-fro on a track in anticipation of future electric automation later, and not to swing open on hinges; it was only being manually operated as a temporary and an interim arrangement. I then battled for some time to stabilise the right 'half' of the gate in an upright position while I was frantically clutching the left gate with my left arm and hand, and that gate and I must have swung each other around alternatively for some time (like the tail wagging the dog) fighting for superiority trying to wrestle, manoeuvre and bludgeon each other into submission.

Finally, when I last had subdued the 'half' on the left, I had to repeat the same performance with the 'half' on the right. I had, the previous evening, seen the host's little daughter, still a toddler, running around on the premises and the last thing I wanted to do was leave the premises with heavy life-threatening metal-gear that could possibly injure the little girl. What amazed me was that, through the entire time in the quiet and early hours of that morning that the dreadful and embarrassing saga had lasted, no one had woken up from the incredible commotion in the yard ... I mean, the noisy racket caused by my science-fiction like altercation with the mute, but nevertheless highly opinionated gate must have been like something from a 'dual-to-the-death' scene in a 'Transformers' movie in full 3-D.

When I finally succeeded to stabilise the two belligerents to my complete satisfaction, that is, where the two subjugated brutes were now standing there forlorn and disgraced, propped-up against the fence on both sides of the driveway, I jumped into the car and drove expeditiously in the general direction of the mine. I was about twenty minutes late on my schedule, but fortunately made it in time for my appointment, as another wonderful trait of South Africans is that most of them never are on time for appointments anyway. It is a standing joke in South Africa that, although Switzerland may have all the world's watches, Africa has all the time in the world.

My aim now was to phone my host at about 10am during our first break and ask him to make sure the gates have been properly secured for the sake of the children and the guests on the premises. But, as fate would have it, the preliminary induction-protocols were taking longer than expected, as the lecture by the designated trainers had to be interpreted or translated unremittingly to its bored and restive audience from English into 'Fanagalo' (a clever mining lingua franca invented years ago by the mining industry to facilitate communication between the different tribes working in mines all over the country) in its entirety.

So, in the final analysis, what it meant was that everything that was being said on South African mines and in the many other industries during lectures, speeches or the dissemination of information in public etc. usually had to be said at least twice, but often more than twice.

It must be borne in mind that South Africa has eleven official languages (*Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Northern Sotho, Sotho, Swazi, Tswana, Tsonga, Venda, Xhosa*, and *Zulu)* plus sizable Jewish, Indian, Portuguese, Dutch, French, Lebanese, German, Greek and other minorities making a living here which had not necessarily been accommodated in terms of official-language status. The lingua franca just mentioned, i.e., *Fanagalo*, is not a bona fide language, and opinions differ widely as to the feasibility of the language as a long-term proposition for industry:

"Fanagalo is a pidgin (simplified) language based primarily on Zulu, with English and a small Afrikaans input. It is used as a lingua franca, mainly in the gold, diamond, coal and copper mining industries in South Africa and to a lesser extent in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Although it is used as a second language only, the number of speakers was estimated 'several hundred thousand' in 1975. As with India, once the British went, English became the lingua franca enabling different tribes in the same country to communicate with each other, and Fanagalo use declined.

"Fanagalo is the only Zulu-based pidgin language, and is a rare example of a pidgin based on an indigenous language rather than on the language of a colonising or trading power.

"The variety in Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) is known as Chilapalapa and is influenced by Shona, while the variety in Zambia (Northern Rhodesia), called Cikabanga (pronounced, and sometimes spelt, Chikabanga), is influenced by Bemba."

[Wikipedia].

Once, when I had to play host to two mining-engineers who had arrived from Europe for an exploratory visit to our iron-ore mine in the Bushveldt region of South Africa, I asked: "*You realise, of course, that most mineworkers in South Africa use a special lingua franca specifically designed for the mining-industry to improve communication between the different tribes working here?"* One of the engineers (bless his heart) then quickly quipped: "*Yes, I know, I have heard: It's called 'Funiculi-Funicula'!"*

Nevertheless, when I at last had managed to phone my host at the guesthouse and explain my predicament to him, he was not a little distraught, and said it to me in no uncertain terms: *"I assume you realise that the gate will have to be repaired?"* upon which I replied: *"Yes, I understand, and I take full responsibility for its repairs. Furthermore, I am frightfully sorry for the damage and the inconvenience I now may have caused. Please make sure that your little daughter and the other guests are safe."*

We then agreed to discuss the matter in depth as soon as I had arrived home from the mine that afternoon. When I arrived at the guesthouse that afternoon, I walked straight toward the little administrative office where the host and a friend was sitting, chatting, and where I entered the room with all kinds of profuse confessions and apologies. To my utter surprise the host, however, then rose magnificently to the occasion by forgiving me wholeheartedly with the following comforting words: "*No problem, sir, this gentleman here has already offered to fix the gate for me. He has inspected the damage and has assured me that it is of no serious consequence at all, and that he'll have the gate operating again in a jiffy!"*

"But what about the repairs and all the expenses involved ...?" I inquired, stumped.

The handyman-friend then interjected: "*I'll be doing it for my friend for free, for in the past we have often assisted each other during similar crises. All we're asking you is to make sure that you help us spread the word of this here fine guesthouse. One good turn deserves another!"* Then jokingly: *"One thing is sure ... I'll never ever try to tussle with you!"*

The host then turned to me with the following assurance: *"Truthfully, this is not the first time that this type of thing had happened. With the low visibility at the gate during the early hours of the morning, many a guest in the past have already been fooled by the out-dated mechanics of the gate, and, after careful consideration of the situation, we have decided that it was not entirely your fault alone. Furthermore, what makes your case so special is that you're the first person to come and confess to us that it had been you who had damaged the gate ... in the past the others had simply driven off hoping never to be discovered at all!"*

References

1. Angloamericanplatinum.com. *Anglo American Platinum*. Online.

2. Bafokengplatinum.co.za. *Bafokeng Rasimone Platinum Mine.* Online.
3. Britannica.com. *Africa.* Online.
4. Britannica.com. *Ndebele.* Online.
5. Britannica.com. *Philip Dormer Stanhope, 4th Ear of Chesterfield/English writer.* Online.
6. Britannica.com. *Rustenburg.* Online.
7. Britannica.com. *World War 2.* Online.
8. Britannica.com. *Xhosa Language.* Online.
9. Forbes.com. *Forbes Magazine.* Online.
10. Frankzane.com. *Frank Zane's Official Website.* Online.
11. Nrjsteel.com. *Steel Tubing & Pipes.* Online.
12. Suninternational.com. *Sun City Resort in Northwest/South Africa.* Online.
13. Webmd.com. *Metastatic melanoma.* Online.
14. Wikipedia. *2010 FIFA World Cup.* Online.
15. Wikipedia. *Arnold Schwarzenegger.* Online.
16. Wikipedia. *Bench press.* Online.
17. Wikipedia. *Dagga.* Online.
18. Wikipedia. *Dave Draper.* Online.
19. Wikipedia. *Doug Hepburn.* Online.
20. Wikipedia. *Edgar Rice-Burroughs.* Online.
21. Wikipedia. *Fanagalo.* Online.
22. Wikipedia. *Funiculì, Funiculà.* Online.
23. Wikipedia. *Gordon Scott.* Online.
24. Wikipedia. *Hercules.* Online.
25. Wikipedia. *John Grimek.* Online.
26. Wikipedia. *Johnny Weismuller.* Online.
27. Wikipedia. *Lex Barker.* Online.
28. Wikipedia. *List of Lingua Francas.* Online.
29. Wikipedia. *Northern Sotho Language.* Online.
30. Wikipedia. *Paraphernalia.* Online.
31. Wikipedia. *Phokeng.* Online.
32. Wikipedia. *Pidgin/Pidgin Language.* Online.
33. Wikipedia. *Reg Park.* Online.
34. Wikipedia. *Royal Bafokeng Nation.* Online.
35. Wikipedia. *Sotho Language.* Online.
36. Wikipedia. *Steve Reeves.* Online.
37. Wikipedia. *Swazi Language.* Online.
38. Wikipedia. *Switzerland.* Online.
39. Wikipedia. *Tarzan.* Online.
40. Wikipedia. *Transformers (film).* Online.
41. Wikipedia. *Tsonga Language.* Online.
42. Wikipedia. *Tswana Language.* Online.
43. Wikipedia. *Venda Language.* Online.
44. Wikipedia. *Zulu Language.* Online.

40

Herbie's Hernia

After a good dinner, one can forgive anybody, even one's own relations.
[Oscar Wilde, 1854-1900].

When Adolf Hitler requested Ferdinand Porsche in 1934 to design a 'people's car' for the German people, he could never have foreseen that the *Volkswagen Beetle Type 1* would one day become the fourth-most influential car of the 20th century, the other three being the *Ford Model T* (1st), the *Mini* (2nd) and the *Citroen DS* (3rd). So popular had the Volkswagen Beetle become that it was serialised during the 1960s in several hilarious 'Herbie' films, starring Dean Jones.

Ferdinand Porsche's basic brief was to design an 'economy car' that could transport two adults and three children at an average speed of 62 miles per hour (100 kph), and it eventually were produced on a massive scale worldwide from 1938 until 2000. In South Africa, so many Volkswagen Beetles were sold in its heyday that the rumour (satirical) had started doing the rounds that Germany were going to reduce the size of the Volkswagen Beetle even more ... to get more of them simultaneously on the road during the rush hour.

South Africans drive right-hand drive cars on the left side of the road, while Americans, for instance, drive left-hand drive cars on the right side of the road. More correctly: Most (sober) Americans drive on the right side of the road, while most (inebriated) South Africans, sporting the highest number of drunk drivers in the world according to a 2017 Forbes report, drive on the wrong side of the road.

Our family had driven its fair share of Volkswagen Beetles, from light-blue, light-green, bottle-green and tomato-red to bright yellow. The air-cooled rear-engine driven Volkswagen Beetle was a real workhorse, and adults tease their incredulous children today that the engine in the rear was installed as 'back-up' just in case the wheel under the hood of the car in the front malfunctioned.

Anyone could fix a malfunctioning Volkswagen Beetle, provided such a person knew how to fix a 1960s pinball-machine, and those from my 'baby boomer' generation may still recall many such jokes about the Beetle, for instance:

"How many elephants can ride in a Volkswagen Beetle?"
Answer: *"Four; two in the front and two in the rear!"*

"How does one fit five elephants into a Volkswagen Beetle?"
Answer: "*Don't be daft ... there is only enough room for four: Two in the front and two in the rear!"*

"How many wheels does a Volkswagen have?"
Answer: *"Seven, i.e., four wheels, a spare-wheel, a steering wheel and a flywheel!"*

Later the jokes were of course extended to the even smaller Mini. People were constantly deriding the Volkswagen, and then would get up, walk out and get into a ... Volkswagen. Everybody was driving them in those days, but one of its unfortunate disadvantages was that the hum of an approaching Volkswagen made it virtually impossible for it to be used as a getaway-car during a bank-robbery or by detectives for surveillance purposes. So popular were Volkswagen Beetles that bank-robbers who flouted the unwritten rules and used Volkswagens as

getaway-cars anyway were cautious enough to take two of them along to a 'job' as at least one of them was likely to get stolen during the heist.

To the untrained ear the Volkswagen had the beat of a *Focke-Wulf Fw57* with dirty sparkplugs, and the only significant difference apparently was that, whereas the *Focke-Wulf Fw57* never saw production and had to be satisfied with three prototypes only, the Volkswagen Beetle eventually proliferated into millions.

The much maligned but plucky little Beetle one day had its revenge, however, when it had to be summoned post-haste to extract my hard-pressed family from some difficulties involving the weather. It was in 1963 and we were driving a little blue-grey Beetle at the time, which in the meantime had replaced the old (British) Morris Minor 1000 cc. of earlier days as my father's firm favourite. On this lovely summer-weekend the whole bunch of us, i.e., my father, mother, my mother's kid-sister JeanetteG., my brothers, myself, and a friend called FransG. had decided to take as stroll to a mine-dump in the far distance in the general 'north-eastern' direction of town, past the popular, newly promulgated 'Greenhills' extension of our village to where my father and a friend had earlier run a sawmill among a plot of huge old eucalyptus trees. It was just one of those ordinary family outings on a lazy summer's day.

When we finally, after about an hour, reached the mine-dump and plantation of eucalyptus trees, we noticed with some consternation that a huge storm had been brewing behind us all the time and was now approaching fast from the western outskirts of our village. It was clear to anyone with half a brain-cell that there was no way in which the party, bogged down by a baby in a baby-carriage, was going to retrace its steps back home in time to avoid being caught by the rain, and possibly even a violent hailstorm, as the clouds were being to take on an ominously dark and threatening appearance. There was only one way out ... my friend FransG. had to return to our house, fetch the Volkswagen Beetle and drive back to where the hard-pressed party, which included a baby in a baby-carriage (my brother DeonS.) was standing stranded among the thicket of trees without any umbrellas or raincoats below the already icy drops of rain now plunging down on them with a vengeance.

Frans was licensed to drive a car, but at my age 16 I was not, so we decided that I should make the trip home with Frans as a precaution in case something happened to him, in which case I then (as a last resort) would drive the car anyway, licensed or not. We ran home as fast as possible, with the older FransG., an accomplished (former) high-school athlete, far in front of me. When we arrived at home about twenty minutes later, FransG. grabbed the keys to the car and set off to rescue the stranded party, and they were back in the safety of our home on the outskirts of our village within a matter of minutes, not much worse off for the wear.

My parents' biggest concern during the whole ordeal was the lightning, as they had been very vulnerable standing beneath those tall trees adjacent to the mine-dump. Bear in mind that many people, among them golfers, have been killed in South Africa because of the lightning strikes. For instance, it has been reported that, during February 2013, nine South African children were hospitalized after a lightning incident occurred on a cricket field at their school, injuring five children on the pitch and four girls who were walking home. When we were still living in the Bushveldt district of South Africa, a young artisan, an electrician with a family at home, was killed by a lightning-strike while working on a pole at our 'Donkerpoort' opencast ('surface') mine (Afrikaans for 'dark ravine': Pronounce 'Dongkherpohrt'). The lightning strike, which left him dead and dangling about seven metres high from the pole, had come from virtually nowhere ... there were no visible clouds in the sky worth mentioning at all.

I used to be in the corporate training field for some time, and once, when we were discussing the very issue of the high incidence of lightning strikes in South Africa, especially in rural areas, one young man sat up and said, *"I know why so many people in rural areas are being killed by lightning every year; the ancestral spirits are punishing us because we are so superstitious!"* What baffled me was that he still had the courage to even say it.

Nevertheless, I don't think there was a feature on the Volkswagen Beetle that ever was so belittled and disparaged as its ventilation system. When the heater was not too hot, it was too cold, and the ventilation never really seemed to have been adequate. Fortunately, the small little auxiliary window (now obsolete in most cars) installed inside the doors in the front successfully compensated in summer for the lack of air-conditioning in the car.

So enigmatic and uncomfortable were the ventilation system that one guy on television, Jeff Allen, once remarked and with some justification, that the Volkswagen Beetle was just about the only car in the world where a frostbite-victim, taken to hospital after having been a passenger in a Volkswagen Beetle during winter, would arrive at the hospital's emergency-rooms or trauma-centre to simultaneously treated for both the frostbite and third-degree burns on his ankles.

References

1. Arrivealive.mobi. *Drunk Driving & Road Safety/South Africa*. Online.
2. Biography.com. *Ferdinand Porsche*. Online.
3. Britannica.com. *Adolf Hitler*. Online.
4. Britannica.com. *Oscar Wilde*. Online.
5. Corporate.ford.com. *The Model T/Ford Motor Company*. Online.
6. Forbes.com. *The Worst Countries in the World for Drunk Driving*. Online.
7. JeffAllenComedy.com. *Jeff Allen*. Online.
8. Mindat.org. *Donkerpoort/Thabazimbi/Waterberg District Municipality*. Online.
9. Sciencedirect.com. *Opencast Mining/An Overview*. Online.
10. Theconversation.com. *How Mine Dumps in South Africa the Health of Communities Living Nearby*. Online.
11. Wikipedia. *Dean Jones (Actor)*. Online.
12. Wikipedia. *Focke-Wulf Fw 57*. Online.
13. Wikipedia. *Herbie*. Online.
14. Wikipedia. *Mini/Marque*. Online.
15. Wikipedia. *Morris Minor*. Online.
16. Wikipedia. *Volkswagen Beetle*. Online.

41

Disappointment at Spitskop

The professional military mind is by necessity an inferior and unimaginative mind; no man of high intellectual quality would willingly imprison his gifts in such a calling.
[H.G. Wells, 1866-1946].

I never could for the love of me understand how people could chose the military as a profession, until I realised that, had nobody in the free world ever chosen to do that that, Hitler probably would have been victorious in World War 2. Somebody simply must do it, and although I loathed every minute of my years of compulsory conscription and commando service, I certainly am not a full-blown pacifist today. Warmongers and criminals do not give the proverbial 'brass farthing' about our noble pacifist sentiments, and they merrily will wage war, steal, rob, murder and kill whether we like it or not.

So, despite the horrors of war and the gross consequences of military and criminal conflict, I have sort of reconciled myself with the idea that war will be with us always if greed, hate, envy and of course the weapons and munitions-manufacturing industry are going to be part of the human picture. As longs as guns, rifles, cartridges, bombs and missiles have to be sold, profits are to be made and jobs in the industry must be protected, war will be stoked by someone somewhere to make those industries viable for their masters and shareholders.

Anyway, it so happened that I was, many moons and cups of coffee ago, again called up for a 'refresher camp' at 'Spitskop' (Afrikaans: Pronounce '*Spitzcop'*) at 'Potchefstroom' (Afrikaans: Pronounce 'Pott-chiff-strohme') one day. I was in the military police and our work entailed typical (military) police work, security, detective work, some localised, micro-level 'military intelligence' (pardon the ugly oxymoron) and traffic control. During this camp, a stretch of only 26 days, we found ourselves 'bivouacked' in long rows of tents and were engaged in the daily chores and duties normally associated with our line of work, usually the delivering of some supportive, auxiliary service in aid of the annual manoeuvres and war-games arranged by the army top-brass for the infantry, artillery, sappers and panzers etc.

Although I am the type of person that loathes army duties and chores and everything associated with the army and with war, I have learnt the hard way many years ago during the early days of basic training that cooperation and commitment were the keys to success, and that, if one were to choose the insufferable and bellicose route of a combative and confrontational attitude, relations would be strained to such an extent that time would crawl like a snail nursing a football injury trying to wade through cold peanut butter. I consequently always tried to commit to the goals and objectives of my superiors as soon as I had arrived in camp which, eventually, once landed me the epithet of 'willing donkey'. This I didn't mind at all, for as far as I was concerned there were only so many hours in a day, and it was important for me to keep busy.

One day, when we were returning from point-duty along some long-forgotten route, I was sitting in the back of a jeep, and as the vehicle was a little crowded and confined between the lot of us, I quickly aimed at the little platform where, unfortunately, some of the heat from the general area of the crankshaft of the vehicle was generated. At first the heat appeared to be a welcome addition to my general comfort, for it was cold on the open jeep especially with the wind blowing through us in the silver of the late-evening moonlight, but as we progressed toward camp, I became more and more aware that something was not right. The inordinate amount of heat coming from behind was beginning to take a heavy toll on my kidneys at the back, while the icy drafts blowing over us from the front was hitting us full in the face at the velocity of about 100 kph. Something was surely going to give ... it simply had to.

Now, soldiers becoming ill or injured during manoeuvres were not necessarily a strange or new thing to us. In fact, we had heard just a few days before a cook (an army-chef) in one of the camps had a large pressure-cooker explode in his face and was lying in the military hospital in town covered in bandages and Mercurochrome®'. Another soldier, who had been standing in the machine-gun turret of a tank, had dropped the heavy iron-hatch of the tank on his thumb, thereby mangling it beyond recognition and probably beyond saving too. It was cold at night in Potchefstroom that season and the thought of those horrific injuries made one shudder.

One day our '2-I.C.', or 'second-in-command', LieutenantD., had us all assembled on the parade-ground to brief us on a very important camp-inspection that were apparently going to come down the following week. I was carrying the NCO-rank of 'sergeant' at the time and honestly wanted my crew and myself to make a good impression on the top-brass coming to perform the inspection. "*Do what you do, do well!*" I always say. The inspection was to be carried out by some high-ranking colonel or something. In the meantime, my discomfort because of that fateful evening's ride in the back of the jeep was beginning to exact a heavy toll on my well-being. I was beginning to feel increasingly feverish, nauseous, dizzy, and wobbly. I nevertheless had already decided to stick to my resolve not to report sick until the inspection was past and waited anxiously and with bated breath for the next morning's inspection scheduled for 12p.m. in the afternoon.

The next day, with the inspection looming at 12p.m., we had ourselves lined up early in front of our tents and stood patiently at attention in the hot and unforgiving sun awaiting our turn of inspection. The inspection-contingent, comprising the visiting colonel, our commander and his 2-I.C., Lieutenant D. and some orderlies, was advancing at a snail's pace down the lines of the four rows of tents. I stand to be corrected but I think our tent was in the middle of the third row of tents. The last thing any soldier wants to do is disappoint his regiment and his commander, but I must admit that, at that juncture, I was being to feel increasingly jittery and worried.

Then it was our turn, and although it was chilly in the evenings, the sweltering midday-heat was blazing away as if it was getting paid like an overtime-worker at double the normal rate. The last thing I remember was the colonel halting right in front of me, and I saluting him as the protocol required. He examined my boots, checked my shirt-pocket buttons, and then lifted his eyes to my face to scrutinize my beard for any grooming glitches, anomalies, and incongruities. Then everything went black, and, when I woke up, I was lying on my back in my tent with my shirt unbuttoned for ventilation, and my reward for fainting on the superior officer-for-inspection was to spend the next three days in hospital next to the chef in the bandages and the Mercurochrome® on his face (on the one side) and the guy with the mangled finger (on the other side).

References

1. Britannica.com. *Artillery*. Online.
2. Britannica.com. *Infantry*. Online.
3. Britannica.com. *Non-commissioned Officer/NCO*. Online.
4. Britannica.com. *Sapper*. Online.
5. Britannica.com. *World War 2*. Online.
6. Geoview.info. *Spitskop Hill/North-West, South Africa*. Online.
7. Wikipedia. *Adolf Hitler*. Online.
8. Wikipedia. *H.G. Wells*. Online.
9. Wikipedia. *Merbromin/Mercurochrome*. Online.
10. Wikipedia. *Military Intelligence*. Online.
11. Wikipedia. *Pacifism*. Online.
12. Wikipedia. *Potchefstroom*. Online.
13. Wikipedia. *South African Defence Force*. Online.
14. Wikipedia. *Warmonger*. Online.

42

Beware the Tokoloshe

Babylon in all its desolation is a sight not so awful as that of the human mind in ruins.
[Scrope Berdmore Davies, 1783-1852].

Few things frighten some of our indigenous peoples more than the *Tokoloshe*, and although many of the urbanised folk had already begun to abandon most of the primitive superstitions, some who follow these superstitions religiously, especially those in the remote, rural areas of South Africa, still flourish.

I have alluded to it before and repeat it in passing, that one young man in Johannesburg one day had said to me that the reason so many people are killed by lightning strikes in South Africa each year is because of the people's many superstitions; apparently (he argued) the ancestral spirits of the forefathers are angry at people for being so superstitious and the lethal lightning strikes are part of the punishment meted out to such people by the infuriated forefathers. What amazed me was that he was able to leave the lecture-room, where I had been conducting some safety-training for my company, alive at all. The forefathers must have been more benevolent that day than he could ever have imagined at the time:

> *"In Zulu mythology, Tikoloshe, Tokoloshe or Hili is a dwarf-like water sprite. It is considered a mischievous and evil spirit that can become invisible by drinking water. Tokoloshes are called upon by malevolent people to cause trouble for others. At its least harmful a tokoloshe can be used to scare children, but its power extends to causing illness and even death upon the victim. The way to get rid of him is to call in the n'anga (witch doctor), who has the power to banish him from the area."*
>
> [Wikipedia].

In reading the above one cannot be blamed for suspecting that the myth of the 'Tokoloshe' had been invented by witchdoctors to increase the demand for their revenue-creating services. Not all African traditions are necessarily evil, but even the good ones can sometimes be quite lethal, reminding me of the (German) Christian clergyman Dietrich Bonhoeffer's philosophy that stupid people are far more dangerous than evil people; he must have been correct as he did not survive the Nazi concentration camp.

Be that as it may, apparently twenty-four young boys attending a traditional initiation school were killed from injuries (which included some excruciating, botched circumcisions) sustained this week, and I am practically listening to the news as I write. The alarmist and sensationalist (and lucrative?) perpetuation of the myth of the Tokoloshe in the common (main) media continues, and it may interest the reader to note the monotonous application of the ever-present exclamation-mark in contemporary (mainline, township) newspaper-headings. Some examples:

- "Tokoloshe Splits Couple!"
- "This Pap Tokoloshe Sells Like Hot Cakes!"
- "Terror of the Gay Tokoloshe!"
- "Terror by Tokoloshe!"
- "Cops to Hunt Tokoloshe!"
- "Tokoloshe Haunts Mlungu!"
- "Tokoloshe Stops Church Service!"

Patrons can buy 'Tokoloshe Salts' to make them 'stronger' as well as books on the exploits of the Tokoloshe, e.g., *Tales of the Tokoloshe* etc. I am currently reading Washington Irving's fascinating 1832 book *Tales of the Alhambra* and wonder: Am I wasting my time? Shouldn't I be reading *Tales of the Tokoloshe* instead? After all, I live in South Africa, not in Granada, Spain.

I have already mentioned the case of the jilted boyfriend in Cape Town who was arrested by the police this year (2014) eating his rival's heart with a knife and a fork, and the following question apparently still baffles the experts*: "Does eating his cannibalised meat with a knife and a fork make a cannibal more civilised?"*

Citizens in South Africa are confronted with news and social challenges like this almost every day. Adults and children disappear with sickening regularity, only to be found cut up for 'muti' (from the word 'mutilate') in some remote spot in the bush or township, that is, if such a victim was lucky enough to be found at all. Jokes about cannibals, too sick to repeat here, also continue to proliferate.

South Africa is, as the reader surely must have deduced by now, an enigmatic country. It's a technologically advanced country run by a nation of which about the greater part of its citizens probably still believe in and worship their ancestral spirits. The same country that had produced a golfing-champion like Gary Player, a soldier, statesman, politician and amateur-zoologist like Field Marshall Jan Smuts, a world-class surgeon like Christian Barnard and the world's first heart-transplant, a statesman and humanitarian like Nelson Mandela, the deepest goldmines in the world and the hosting of the giant SKA-telescope ('Square Kilometre Array') is the same country where its (i) backward indigenous peoples (on the one hand) still follow their mythical forefathers and ancestral spirits slavishly and (ii) brilliant Euro-centric (as well as many Afro-centric) academics and scientists (on the other hand) still doggedly believe the primitive Darwinian myth that the Universe (and Nature) had made itself by random, biological accident in terms of the (quite redundant) 'virgin birth of the cosmos' philosophy of 'Evolution'.

Nevertheless, this superstition of the Tokoloshe (and others) is sometimes accompanied by strange incongruities very alien and puzzling to the average Euro-centric mind. For instance, during the 2010 Soccer World Cup when South Africa was designated by FIFA as the host nation for the Tournament, the national team 'Bafana-Bafana' reportedly invoked their 'ancestral spirits' with all kinds of occult rituals to ensure a positive (and if possible, even the first prize) for the team. The actual performance of the national team that year, however, reportedly was the worst performance by the national team of a host nation in FIFA world cup history. If this did not make people think, nothing ever will.

The narrative now, of necessity, temporarily digresses to the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. During this infamous clash between Boer and Brit there was a gutsy young reporter working for the British paper, the *Morning Post*, who went by the name of Winston Churchill, son of the illustrious Sir Randolph Churchill. Winston Churchill was born in Blenheim Palace in England and had first seen action first-hand in the clash between Lord Horatio Kitchener and the Dervishes of Egypt. While serving a correspondent for the newspaper, however, he was captured near Ladysmith in Natal when the armoured train they were travelling in was ambushed by the Boers, probably at the time led by General Louis Botha. It is interesting to note that, in his book, *Great Contemporaries*, Churchill refers to General Louis Botha as one of his three all-time favourite 'B-generals', the other two being General William Booth of the Salvation Army, and General (Lord) Baden-Powell (pronounced *'Pow-well',* not 'Powel') of the Mafeking-siege and Boy Scouts fame.

Churchill was then arrested on the grounds that he, as newspaper-reporter supposedly a non-combatant, was carrying a revolver at the time of his arrest and was sent to the 'State Model School' in Pretoria (where I live today) for imprisonment and where the brown-brick complex

can still be seen in the Pretoria CBD being industriously utilized even today. While the Boer High Command was procrastinating on Churchill's possible release or fate, Churchill had in the meantime already escaped over the fence of the makeshift-prison and was making his way to 'Witbank', a thriving coal-mining region about 100 kilometres (62 mi) east of Pretoria.

Interestingly, the very man who had interviewed him with such ruthless military efficiency at the State Model School in Pretoria, General Jan Smuts, was the very man to one day develop into his best friend outside of Britain for the duration of the two world wars of 1914-1918 and 1939-1945. Incidentally, Jan Smuts, later also known as 'Field Marshall Smuts' (a British rank bestowed compliments of Winston Churchill) was the only man in history to have lived long enough to become a signatory to the (i) Anglo-Boer War's *Treaty Of Vereeniging* (1902) at Melrose House in Pretoria, the (ii) *Treaty of Versailles* in France at the end of the Great War of 1914-1918 and (iii) the *UN Charter* in San Francisco at the end of World War II in 1945.

In South Africa, at Witbank, a mine manager sympathetic to the British cause subsequently took Churchill into hiding in a mine in the underground. Now, immediately after he had arrived by goods-train en route at the coastal resort and port city of Durban, he went to the Durban City Hall, its architecture so reminiscent of the City Hall of Belfast (Ireland), where he made his now famous speech on the steps of the city hall, much to the embarrassment of the Boers. But the amusing element in the story was the way in which he was perceived, by accident, no doubt, and certainly not on purpose, by the mineworkers in that mine where he had been stowed away by his friends for a few days.

A worker still steeped in African superstition had reportedly stumbled by accident on Churchill where he was hiding in an isolated underground chamber of the mine where lazy and recalcitrant workers often went to sleep out of sight of the shift-boss, and, at the unexpected spectacle of the intrepid British reporter and Boer War escapee, reportedly had rushed back in a panic to his bosses with the words:

> *"Boss, come! Quick! There's a little fat man with a big cigar sitting alone there deep down in the mine ... I think it's the tokoloshe!"*

References

1. Britannica.com *Horatio Herbert Kitchener*. Online.
2. Britannica.com. *African Religions*. Online.
3. Britannica.com. *Ancestor Worship*. Online.
4. Britannica.com. *Bafana Bafana*. Online.
5. Britannica.com. *Blenheim Palace*. Online.
6. Britannica.com. *Boer/People*. Online.
7. Britannica.com. *Boy Scouts*. Online.
8. Britannica.com. *Christiaan Barnard*. Online.
9. Britannica.com. *Darwinism*. Online.
10. Britannica.com. *Dervish*. Online.
11. Britannica.com. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer/German Theologian*. Online.
12. Britannica.com. *Egypt*. Online.
13. Britannica.com. *England*. Online.
14. Britannica.com. *Evolution*. Online.
15. Britannica.com. *FIFA/Sports Organisation*. Online.
16. Britannica.com. *Gary Player*. Online.
17. Britannica.com. *Gold Mining/South Africa*. Online.
18. Britannica.com. *Heart Transplant/Medical Procedure*. Online.
19. Britannica.com. *Jan Smuts/South African Statesman*. Online.
20. Britannica.com. *Johannesburg*. Online.
21. Britannica.com. *Ladysmith/South Africa*. Online.
22. Britannica.com. *Lord Randolph Churchill*. Online.
23. Britannica.com. *Louis Botha*. Online.

24. Britannica.com. *Natal*. Online.
25. Britannica.com. *Nelson Mandela*. Online.
26. Britannica.com. *Radio Telescope Summary/Britannica.* Online.
27. Britannica.com. *Sangoma/Zulu Healer*. Online.
28. Britannica.com. *South Africa*. Online.
29. Britannica.com. *South African War*. Online.
30. Britannica.com. *Spontaneous Regeneration*. Online.
31. Britannica.com. *Superstition*. Online.
32. Britannica.com. *Thunderstorm Electrification*. Online.
33. Britannica.com. *Virgin Birth*. Online.
34. Britannica.com. *Winston Churchill*. Online.
35. Britannica.com. *Witchdoctor*. Online.
36. Britannica.com. *World Cup 2010/Football.* Online.
37. Britannica.com. *Zulu/People*. Online.
38. Churchill, Winston (1937, 1947) *Great Contemporaries*. Thornton Butterworth Ltd.
39. Dsae.co.za. *Hili.* Online.
40. SA-venues.com. *Durban City Hall/Kwazulu-Natal.* Online.
41. Skatelescope.org. *Square Kilometre Array (SKA).* Online.
42. UN.org. *UN Charter*. Online.
43. Wikipedia. *Belfast City Hall*. Online.
44. Wikipedia. *Melrose House*. Online.
45. Wikipedia. *Pretoria*. Online.
46. Wikipedia. *Robert Baden-Powell, 1st Baron Baden-Powell*. Online.
47. Wikipedia. *San Francisco*. Online.
48. Wikipedia. *Scrope Berdmore Davies*. Online.
49. Wikipedia. *Siege of Mafeking*. Online.
50. Wikipedia. *Staats Model School*. Online.
51. Wikipedia. *The Salvation Army.* Online.
52. Wikipedia. *Tikoloshe.* Online.
53. Wikipedia. *Treaty of Vereeniging*. Online.
54. Wikipedia. *Treaty of Versailles*. Online.
55. Wikipedia. *William Booth*. Online.
56. Wikipedia. *Witbank*. Online.
57. Wikipedia. *World War 1*. Online.

43

Taken for a Ride (Twice)

Thieves respect property. They merely wish the property to become their property that they may more perfectly respect it.
[G.K. Chesterton, 1874-1936].

If you ever should visit Durban in KwaZulu-Natal, make sure you take a ride on a Zulu-rickshaw. Apart from the rickshaw-ride, Durban has a lot to offer for the discerning tourist. Most prolific is the 'Valley of a Thousand Hills' areas with its beautiful rolling hills of green as far as they can see. There is the 'Oribi Gorge' and lush beaches with a large aquarium. A drive either up the North or South coasts is an amazing experience as fields of lush sugarcane greet the motorist almost around every bend in the road. For the culture buff, Hindu-temples and Mohammedan-mosques embellish city-centres and urban hills dotted with colourful homes of every kind and type. There are many golf-courses, and years ago I once played a little mashie-course not far from my aunt's home in Puntans Hill.

State-of-the-art shopping malls are rising like mushrooms all over the metropolis and overseas institutions vie for the best venues in Durban for their international conventions or conferences. Stadiums abound, and Durban was only one of many host cities for FIFA's 2010 Soccer World Cup. There are museums and the CBD offers a charming botanical garden with some massive trees, some more than a hundred years old.

As I have already mentioned, my aunt used to live in Puntans Hill, a suburb in Durban with a panoramic view over the upmarket suburbs of Pinetown, Cowies Hill and Kloof. To take the bus to the city CBD, one must pass through such suburbs as Morningside or Red Hill, depending on the choice of route. I think it is in Red Hill where the iconic Lion Match Company (Pty) Ltd (established over 100 years ago) still has its factory today. In those days, i.e., the 1960s, I used to visit her regularly during school holidays, and I used to revel in the city with its red double-decker busses and interesting suburbs, some quite historic with architecture reminiscent from the 19th century and the Edwardian age. I once walked home from a doctor's consulting rooms kilometres away just to admire the interesting homes and the lush tropical gardens along the way. It was simply valley upon valley of narrow, winding roads overgrown with banana trees and wild strelitzia.

In the bus on the way to town one used to pass the racecourse where the annual 'Rothman's July Handicap' was presented until the ban on tobacco-adverts kicked in during the 1990s. In town my uncle JohanZ. used to invite me, long before my days of abstention, from time to time for a beer at the old M.O.T.H. club. A stroll down West or Smith Streets toward the beaches and back was a stroll down memory lane, for it was the exact route that the renowned actor, Sir Christopher Lee, waiting patiently for the military directive that would hopefully have sent him off to Rhodesia, had walked during World War 2 from the beachfront to the Durban-CBD every morning as a young aspiring fighter-pilot to call for his mail at the post office.

My friend GerritV. and I used to play darts in many a sleazy pub on that route to the sounds of a plastered piano-player on a beat-up honky-tonk. We were guileless teenagers still hopelessly disoriented in a world made for responsible, grown-up people versus felons of the worst kind. For instance, we were strolling down Smith Street one evening, just after having watched a movie, when either a drunk or a joker, probably on a dare or something, lobbed one of those heavy, large, old-fashioned iron refuse-bins from an apartment-block on one of the top-floors of a building. The object hit the pavement (sidewalk) with a deafening thud that reduced its size from

about 80 centimetres (tall) down to about 30 centimetres in a split second, just about two metres from where we were walking.

It was a heart-stopping moment, and we were lucky to have escaped with our lives; why we did not go to lay a charge of 'attempted murder' at the nearest police station still baffles me today. A few hours earlier we had dropped in at a theatre where they were playing Elvis' *Crying in the Chapel, a* top-ten hit at the time over the sound system. I was still smoking in those days, and as there were no anti-smoking regulations in place yet, I set my cigarette alight with the usual youthful, stylish swagger, after I had inserted it the wrong side around, back-to-front into my mouth. The cigarette's filter lit up like a large firecracker during the annual Guy Fawkes celebrations.

During the 1950s our parents used to take us to the beachfront amusement-park, where we were amazed by the large assortment of side-splitting 'laughing mirrors' and where we drove the little 'Dodgems' for (metaphorically) hours on end. A ride on the fearsome-looking Zulu-rickshaws was next, and that we enjoyed with some trepidation. Durban's beaches are very popular, but apparently not suitable for movies ... the breakers are reportedly too violent, loud and vocal for comfort.

Incidentally, some Zulu-people are very fond of poetry, but in the rural, Afro-centric sense. When I asked an articulate young man one day what his favourite poem was, he replied: *"Ode to a Dead Cow",* probably referring to the Xhosa poem, *'Lament for a Dead Cow'* as translated by Francis Carey Slater. Because in many a Zulu community cattle may constitute the bulk of a family's fortunes, the reference to this poem is understood.

We once went strolling about a hundred metres into the sea on one of those huge drainage pipes, hands in the pocket and cigarette in the mouth and walking on the 'walls' laid out in a grid formation on top of the pipes. When I tried to step down, however, from an elevation of about 30 cm. onto what I thought was some green moss on the surface of the pipe, I found it to be a slippery, green oozing slime instead, which transformed my anthropological posture from 'classical bipedal' to 'heels-over-head' in a second. My friend has had to extract me from the mess, and the one lesson I had learned from that experience was that those pictures in the comics of Dagwood slipping on a banana-peel in the middle of the night in front of his refrigerator in the dark and spinning in mid-air like a Hindu fire-wheel was not necessarily entirely fictional.

So, the last time we were in Durban my wife and my daughter decided to take a ride on the famous Durban (Zulu) rickshaw. A rickshaw offers two seats accommodating two passengers at a time during a ride, so there would have been no point in me riding alone in a rickshaw on my own. The rickshaws have their own rickshaw-terminal where they stand waiting dressed in their colourful headgear, warlike rickshaw-apparel and the usual, traditional African accoutrements, trappings and appurtenances associated with the 'trade', appealing to potential patrons for rides. They present an interesting and flamboyant, if not startling, spectacle and are very popular with tourists ... it has become a proud, iconic tradition over the years.

On the day of the ride, the strictly municipal-monitored and controlled fees for a ride was advertised as R2 per person. The rickshaw would take his patron around the block by running ahead and pulling his carriage with great fanfare, whistling and all kinds of gesticulations while negotiating the incredibly dangerous first-world rush-hour traffic of the city. The rickshaw operator must undoubtedly be remarkably powerful and fit, as they are all accomplished rickshaw-athletes of renown. It usually is an exhilarating ride and worth the while for tourists, adrenaline-junkies, and culture enthusiasts alike.

When they arrived back at the terminal, however, an altercation with the rickshaw-driver, i.e., the one that had taken them around the block on the rickshaw-route, ensued after he insisted on a payment of R5 per person, an unexpected increase on the official municipal norm displayed on the municipal sign (i.e., R2 during the late 1980s) of 150%. The altercation lasted for a few embarrassing moments until we finally bid the agitated driver adieu, for there was no way in which

we were going to allow him to change the rules of the game unilaterally at such short notice without at least consulting all the stakeholders timely in the process.

As we drove away, rather chagrined because of the unpleasant experience, I mentioned a little sarcastically to my wife: *"Come to think of it, the fee of R5 per person was not as extortionate as you were making it out to be. After all, the driver was more than willing to take you guys for a ride ... twice. The extra R3 was for the second one."*

References

1. Alamy.com. *Zulu Rickshaw Puller/Durban.* Online.
2. Britannica.com. *Edwardian Era/British History.* Online.
3. Britannica.com. *Hinduism.* Online.
4. Britannica.com. *World War 2.* Online.
5. Chesterton.org. *The Society of Gilbert Keith Chesterton.* Online.
6. Dokumen.tips. *Lament for a Dead Cow.* Online.
7. Geotargit.com. *Where is Puntans Hill in South Africa?* Online.
8. Halatrip.com. *Mosques in Durban/South Africa.* Online.
9. Kznia.org.za. *Hindu Temples/Durban.* Online.
10. Lakeeland.co.za. *Oribi Gorge Activities/Lake Eland Game Reserve.* Online.
11. Lee, Christopher (2003) *Lord of Misrule.* Orion Publishing.
12. Lionmatch.co.za. *The Lion Match Company (Pty) Ltd.* Online.
13. SA-venues.com. *Valley of a Thousand Hills/Durban.* Online.
14. South-africa.places-in-the-world.com. *Facts and information on Puntans Hill/South Africa.* Online.
15. Wikipedia. *2010 FIFA World Cup.* Online.
16. Wikipedia. *Cowies Hill.* Online.
17. Wikipedia. *Dagwood Bumstead.* Online.
18. Wikipedia. *Durban July Handicap.* Online.
19. Wikipedia. *Elvis Presley.* Online.
20. Wikipedia. *FIFA.* Online.
21. Wikipedia. *Guy Fawkes Night.* Online.
22. Wikipedia. *Honky-tonk.* Online.
23. Wikipedia. *Kloof/Durban.* Online.
24. Wikipedia. *Kwazulu-Natal North Coast.* Online.
25. Wikipedia. *Memorable Order of Tin Hats/M.O.T.H.* Online.
26. Wikipedia. *Pinetown.* Online.
27. Wikipedia. *Rhodesia.* Online.
28. Wikipedia. *South Coast/Kwazulu-Natal.* Online.

44

The Stopped Clock

Time: That which man is always trying to kill, but which ends in killing him.
[Herbert Spencer, 1820-1903].

Gambling, like alcoholism, is a social scourge of immense proportions in South Africa, but I agree with that guy who had said that a country's citizens would rather be 'free' than opt for perpetual compulsory sobriety. Let the people eat cake if they must, but don't take their gambling away from them, and, if push came to shove, a man apparently could do without many things in life, but never without oxygen, water, food and ... hope. That is, even though the agnostic and pessimist, R.G. Ingersoll, has doggedly maintained that. *"Hope is the eternal liar."*

There used to be a time when I also played the horses at Newmarket and Vaal racecourses, but that was a long time ago. I once worked out a permutation that would have given me a nice R21 000 return on an investment of R600, a considerable ratio in the early 1970s. The problem was that I never played ... I was too chicken. Later my father consoled me with the words: *"Don't worry, it was a good thing you hadn't played, or you might have been hooked for life!"*

Suicides from botched bets and broken dreams abound, and I had learnt early in life that unless one had x-ray eyes or could become invisible at will, the prudent thing was to stay away from the gambling table ... period. After all, it was Judge J.C. Bryson who once said: *"An unsuccessful bookmaker is a public benefactor."*

A recent newspaper-report related the story of a Durban man who had won R10 million on the LOTTO only two years ago. A few months ago, however, the same man was arrested for housebreaking and robbing his neighbour of R250 to obtain cash for drugs. He was stone broke only two years after having won R10 million. Ironically, one of the first men to win it big on the LOTTO in South Africa reportedly was a guy called 'Louis Otto' (Abbreviated: L. Otto).

Gambling in casinos 'Las Vegas style' became legal after 1994 with the 'democratization' of South Africa, and casinos have since sprung up all over the country by the dozens. Since research has shown that it is predominantly the poor who are inclined to gamble, what has been happening behind the scenes was the fact that the government, by way of annual gambling-revenue, had found an ingenious way to retrieve lost taxes from the (i) tax-exempt poor, the (ii) low-income and unregulated informal sector and (iii) those dependent on the government's social grants, via LOTTO and casino-gambling. It was Robert Louis Stevenson who once said: "*Our business in the world is not to succeed, but to continue to fail, in good spirits."*

In life my father, who died in 2013 at the age of 89, was never a compulsory gambler, and I have never seen him inebriated ('under the influence'). But, toward the end of his life he started playing the horses, apparently more out of boredom and curiosity than out of addiction. As a retiree (pensioner) he could only risk very modest amounts and, as my mother explained, for at least once a week it made them feel like (potential) 'millionaires' for 24 hours. It was the one vice that after all could not kill him, for all the money in the world that he might have saved by not gambling would not have reversed the rapacious cancer spreading like wildfire through his body.

I did try very hard to dissuade him from smoking and gambling, not because he was losing a significant amount or wasting away his meagre 'fortune', but for the simple reason that, in his condition, one would imagine a person to be more contemplative about the immediate future (and impending Eternity or Hereafter) and not waste time on such typically juvenile, hedonistic, and decadent pursuits in life. There was one thing my father, however, never did lose, no matter how sick he was, and that was his sense of humour.

I once reprimanded him, for instance (after their boast that they had forecast the winner for a certain race accurately and consequently had won some nominal amount at the races) that even a stopped clock (technically an unreliable source of information) could still be considered deadly accurate at least twice a day, but that it did not, however, say much about the reliability of the clock. Instead of contemplating my words philosophically and perhaps learning from it, however, the following Saturday he phoned me and said: *"Guess what? During the last race this week our stopped clock was accurate once more again!"*

References

1. Alcoholrehabguide. *What is Alcoholism?* Online.
2. Britannica.com. *Gambling.* Online.
3. Britannica.com. *Robert Louis Stevenson.* Online.
4. Press.princeton.edu. *Democratization in South Africa.* Online.
5. Wikipedia. *Bookmaker.* Online.
6. Wikipedia. *Herbert Spencer.* Online.
7. Wikipedia. *Las Vegas Strip.* Online.
8. Wikipedia. *Robert G. Ingersoll.* Online.

45

The Great Stamp Mill Contest

The surest way to be deceived is to consider oneself cleverer than others.
[François, Duc de la Rochefoucauld, 1613-1680].

At the large steel mill where I used to work during the late seventies and early eighties, two workers, a labourer, and his shift-foreman, once announced an important contest to compare their skills at the stamp mill, also called a 'stamp battery', in their section. Stamp mills were designed to crush, and not grind, materials flat or down, and each of the two rivals, both experienced and adroit in their field, was claiming superiority as the best stamp mill operator in captivity. The stamp mill is described as follows:

> *"A stamp mill consists of a set of heavy steel (iron-shod wood in some cases) stamps, loosely held vertically in a frame, in which the stamps can slide up and down. They are lifted by cams on a horizontal rotating shaft. As the cam moves from under the stamp, the stamp falls onto the ore below, crushing the rock, and the lifting process is repeated at the next pass of the cam."*
>
> [Wikipedia].

The contest was going to be carried out complete with eyewitnesses, of which my brother-in-law, DeonB., was going to be part, that is, if I could call him that, for he was my mother's kid-sister JeanetteG.'s husband, which would make him an 'uncle', although we lived and walked like brothers-in-law.

The contest entailed each contestant's the placing of his own wristwatch on the stamp mill crushing surface, upon which the contestant then had to lower the stamp mill stamp by way of a lever at high speed but with sufficient finesse to stop it in time not to crush the wristwatch below. The contestant who would bring the stamp mill stamp down to a stop closest to the wristwatch would win the contest and be declared the champion stamp mill operator.

The true test of a great stamp mill operator of that kind of stamp mill apparently hinged upon 'masterful control' of the stamp mill stamp, and, to judge from the boastings of the two contestants, the match was going to have been decided within a matter of millimetres.

So, upon the day of the contest, several eyewitnesses had gathered around the stamp mill in question, and the two contestants were announced with great fanfare and pomp ... well, as much as an industrial setting at work could of course under the circumstances allow. The question about who the best stamp mill operator in captivity was had to be decided once and for all, here and now. As already alluded to, each contestant had to sacrifice his wristwatch of choice for the purpose of the contest, and after the lot had been drawn, the foreman stepped forward for his effort first. Each contestant had three chances to prove his mettle, and after the third effort, the first contestant had to stand back for the other contestant's turn. The best attempt out of three would count as the contestant's contest best.

The foreman proceeded to roll up his sleeves, spit on his hands, wiggle his fingers and lapse into the typical rituals and gesticulations of a champion at large in anticipation of and in sympathy with the adulation of the bystanders jam-packed into the general geographical location of the stamp mill. Contrary, however, to what the crowd had apparently been expecting, the foreman did not don his protective gloves in the way the workers are supposed to usually do. The foreman lunged forward, gripped the stamp mill lever as forcefully as possible with his bare hands and

with great skill brought the stamp down on the gold wristwatch below, stopping within millimetres of the precious object. Eventually, after three tries the foreman stepped back, quite satisfied with the results while somebody was measuring his performance and keeping score meticulously. An average was computed, and all indications were that the foreman had apparently done exceptionally well.

Then it was the worker's turn. Now the worker was a very conscientious employee, and he realised that he was supposed to wear his gloves as he had always been trained. But not to be outdone by the foreman, he decided to dump the gloves and go for it bare-fisted, just like the foreman had done. He gripped the lever, activated the stamp mill, and let it fly,twice, but, alas, the efforts did not match those of the foreman even remotely.

Into his last chance, the worker then decided to revert to his original plan of wearing gloves instead of going bare fisted with the last effort. After all, he was trained decades ago while wearing gloves; in fact, he has never used the stamp mill without his gloves, which probably explained his poor performance with the first two tries earlier. Wearing gloves, while operating the stamp mill, was the industry-par for the course.

Then the worker stepped up for the last time. He shrugged his shoulders, rubbed his gloved hands together and then proceeded to let the stamp mill fly. Now bear in mind that the worker unfortunately did not possess an expensive, gold wristwatch to put on the block for the contest. His entire fortune, and the pride of his manhood, was vested in a large 'Westclox Zobo', a pocket-watch on a chain very popular with older people in those days. The problem is, when he brought down the stamp on the Westclox Zobo, his darn right-hand slipped out of its glove, losing some of the acquired magic touch in the process. The upshot was that the stamp hit the pocket-watch with the weight of a freight-train's waggon loaded to the brim with granite from a quarry.

The crowd gasped and the worker shrieked, "*No!*" as the bystanders and judges all went into a mild shock. Then the worker, with the help of some friends, proceeded to lift the stamp from the pocket-watch (or what was left of it), for who knew what could perhaps still be salvaged. When the stamp lifted, the Westclox Zobo was still lying there in all its pristine glory ... as flat as a pancake and almost twice its original size.

Clearly, the foreman had won, and the worker had lost. My brother-in-law later told me that, for him, the final straw was when the worker lifted the remains of his unfortunate pocket-watch to his ear to hear if it was still ticking ... another good story colourfully told and relegated to urban legend.

References

1. Clockhistory.com. *Westclox Zobo Pocket Watch Style Series.* Online.
2. Wikipedia. *François, de la Rochefoucauld.* Online.
3. Wikipedia. *Stamp Mill.* Online.

46

Humour unto Death

Magnificently unprepared for the long idleness of life (of Rupert Brooke).
[Frances Cornford, b.1886].

When my father died on 6 January 2013, he was almost 89 years old, his body beset with cancer. My mother and I had been sitting with him next to his bed in the lounge where we had brought him for easy accessibility by family and friends, when he finally breathed his last.

He was asleep when he died, and he went to his eternal home like it was said of Victor Hugo, i.e., 'like a little child'. Here was a man I had known for sixty-six years, and with whom I had shared, in the marketplace of retail business, at least twelve years of my early life. Together during the 1950s we must have watched dozens of cowboy-westerns in cinemas all over the province, and with him I also had had the opportunity to go and see *How Green Was My Valley* and many other memorable (classic) films during the 1950s, as well as *Bridge on the River Kwai* and *Judgment at Nuremberg* during the early sixties. We also had seen our first Bond-movie, *From Russia with Love,* together in 1964.

Now, I was the eldest of the children and the typically rebellious youth, and together we had argued, bickered, and quarrelled many a long day (and night) into oblivion. Not a man prone to much outward religiosity, he finally recanted his silent, lifelong love-hate relationship with agnosticism (and Christianity) and so made his peace with his Maker on 1 October 2010. When he phoned me to inform me of that that momentous decision on that Saturday-morning, Andre Rieu's 'Amazing Grace' was, amazingly, incidentally playing on the television, and I held my cellphone to the speakers of the television set for him to take cognizance of the remarkable 'coincidence'.

We buried him on 11 January 2013, and it was my privilege to preside at the memorial service in his honour. My father-in-law had, incidentally, been buried on the 9th, two days earlier, so we had had our private little '9-11' week that week.

I also had been an agnostic once, but I had recanted many years ago after I realised that there was no such a thing as a true atheist on this earth. It would appear as if, when push came to shove, few atheists remained atheists on the deathbed at the end of their tenure on this planet. After all, if they had really been atheists, why were they constantly fighting and pointing the finger at the Creator? Just notice all the letters of denial and denouncement to the press ... how can one be so virulently angry at somebody who supposedly did not exist?

C.S. Lewis, the author of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and many other philosophical and Christian works of note, has once said that we can know that the Universe has meaning simply because it has meaning ... if it had had no meaning, we would not even have realised it had no meaning. The very reason that we talk about 'meaning' at all is because it has meaning. After all, what on earth are we here for? Apparently, long ago, the Creator must have decided that all the pain, misery, tears, and blood that this earth would and could ever produce was worth His (and our) while, and that nothing that had ever happened on this planet in the history of humankind could ever match the glory and splendour of the coming world still lying ahead for us. Bishop Thomas Kin (1637-1711) has once said, "*Touch me to live that I may dread ... the grave as little as my bed!"*

That Englishman called the 'prince of preachers', Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892), has reportedly once said, *"Death is not the end of living ... it is the end of dying!"* Isn't it ironical then how many of the classic 'isms' of the world had failed us through the years? For instance:

- *Atheism's* greatest failure was at the point of it greatest boast: A GODLESS Universe (Faith in a benevolent Creator, an Intelligent Designer and a loving Heavenly Father has never been stronger. After all, either God made the Universe, or the Universe has made itself, a ridiculous proposition).

- *Communism's* greatest failure was at the point of its greatest boast: ECONOMICS (It has failed spectacularly in Russia and other communistic regimes).

- *Evolutionism/Darwinism's* greatest failure was at the point of its greatest boast: BIOLOGY (It has failed spectacularly in explaining the Universe's and our origins, and after 'millions of years' of so-called 'human evolution' the mortality rate for every person in every nation is still 100% ... so much for 'progressive Evolution').

- *Nazism's* greatest failure was at the point of its greatest boast: EUGENICS SCIENCE (It has failed spectacularly as the 'superior race' to win World War 2).

- *Fascism's* greatest failure was at the point of its greatest boast: FASCISM (Mussolini himself ended up dead, killed and mocked 'fascistically' by the disillusioned populace in the streets of Italy) etc.

- *Scientism's* greatest failure today is at the point of its greatest boast as society's ultimate and only SILVER BULLET (Failing miserably as the ultimate solution to all of humanity's ailments and problems).

There have been other 'isms' too but let these suffice for now. Obviously, man, ever the curious species, will not refrain from experimenting with evil and playing with fire, so new 'isms' will undoubtedly proliferate indefinitely and eventually, ad nauseum i.e., *Materialism*, *Hedonism, Uniformitarianism*, *Scientology*, *Transcendental Meditation*, *Spiritualism*, *Astrology*, *Paganism, Satanism & Pseudo-Satanism, Soccer Hooliganism* and the latest in fashion among technocratic-minded scientists, innovators and secular humanists, the *World Transformation Movement* and *Transhumanism*.

Nevertheless, had the claims, promises and teachings of that humble carpenter from Nazareth been false, inauthentic, and invalid, this world and all that's in it will have represented the greatest hoax ever played on anybody anywhere at any time. I insist, however that those Russian cosmonauts who had been searching for God in space during the early years of the space-race have been hopelessly deluded by their communist masters ... one will not find Henry Ford by searching for him in the engine of a Model-T Ford.

Boris Pasternak, author of *Dr. Zhivago*, writes:

> "*Yes, there are gifted men, but the fashion nowadays is all for groups and societies of every sort. Gregariousness is always the refuge of mediocrities, whether they swear by Soloviev or Kant or Marx. Only individuals seek the truth, and they shun those whose sole concern is not the truth. How many things in the world deserve our loyalty? Very few, indeed. I think one should be loyal to immortality, which is another word for life, a stronger word for it. One must be true to immortality – true to Christ.*"
>
> [Benson: 68-69].

For once was Adolf Hitler right when he 'prophesied', just a pity he did not heed his own advice:

"*Providence guides us, we act according to the will of the Almighty. No one can make national or world history without the blessing of this Providence.*"

[Klemperer: 280].

The inference was clear: He did not have the blessing, and during World War 2, when bombs were falling intermittently on a beleaguered London, Vera Lynn could still unflaggingly sing one of the forces' many favourites:

"We'll meet again, no matter where no matter when,
some sunny day ... when the lights go on again, all over the world!"

Not many days afterward, on 30 April 1945, the end of the war was (in principle) announced: Hitler had fallen, the Nazis had fled, and the lights were at last going on again, all over the world. In the long run, *Poverty*, whether financially or spiritually, cannot triumph over *Wealth*, whether financially or spiritually ... it simply hasn't got the capital! Even now, as I write, astronomers and astrophysicists are beginning to tell us that there may be planets in existence with cores as big as planet Earth made from pure diamond-crystals. In fact, they suspect that there may be some stars that are entirely constituted of diamond-crystals.

Maintaining a sense of humour in the face of adversity is a tremendous challenge. Victor Klemperer (1881-1960), who during World War 2 was arrested and sent to prison for eight days by the Nazis because he had forgotten to blackout their room at home on the charge of a 'blackout misdemeanour' during an air-raid warning, writes humorously how the prison wardens had taken away his shoelaces and his belt, and consequently, how severely he had been inconvenienced for eight days by that precaution:

"*In translations of American novels, one usually finds the word 'Stop' spelled out between each sentence of a telegram. Similarly, whether I liked it or not, slow-moving time again and again inserted itself between all my thoughts throughout this period: Another 185 hours, another 184, another 183 ... There was no getting away from it, and each one passed more slowly than the one before, and each had its particular restraint.*

"But to be quite precise: This 'Stop' sign only began at hour 186, because only then did I discover a way of buttoning over my trousers so that they stayed on my hips; until then it was not 'Stop' but: 'My trousers are slipping, my trousers are slipping'. What good is all philosophising about the inviolability of one's inner moral dignity? I experienced the misery of the slipping trousers, then of the tied-up trousers as the most extreme humiliation."

[Klemperer: 480-481].

Although as a child (being the eldest among my siblings) I remember my father as a man with a rather short fuse, he nevertheless also had a good sense of humour and, during the 1950s, used to sit with us on Sunday-evenings enjoying the hilarious *Caltex Kaskenades*, an Afrikaans radio-show comprising several hilarious (slapstick type) comedians, sponsored by the petroleum (gas) giant the Caltex Co. He himself, however, often was a source of great amusement.

For instance, when we were visiting my parents one day, he was still away in the bath when we arrived. While we were chatting away enjoying our tea, a strange commotion suddenly erupted, coming from the general direction of the bathroom. It was a sound which reminded of a big, oily ocean-seal jumping and rolling around inside a huge drum. Completely flabbergasted, my mother mercifully put our fears to rest when she said:

"Your sister had also earlier this morning taken a bath, and she must have left some of the bath-oil residue behind in the bath ... the sound you are hearing is your father trying to get out of the bath."

During the last days of his life, just before my father had begun to slide into a semi-coma, he still could display the dry humour he was known for all his life. We were sitting there, my brother HansS., my sister CorneliaS. and I talking about 'solving riddles' when he suddenly, out of the blue, rolled out the following riddle for us to clarify:

"How far did the dog wander into the woods?"

With us mystified and unable to find the answer, my father then mercifully relented:

"Only halfway ... thereafter the dog already was on his way out of the woods again."

My father was also finally out of his neck of the woods when he passed away in his sleep on 6 January 2013.

References

1. Andrerieu.com. *Andre Rieu.* Online.
2. Books.google.co.za. *T.O. Honiball: Culture with a Smile/Caltex Kaskenades. Francois Philippus Verster.* Online.
3. Britannica.com. *Adolf Hitler.* Online.
4. Britannica.com. *Atheism.* Online.
5. Britannica.com. *C.S. Lewis.* Online.
6. Britannica.com. *Communism.* Online.
7. Britannica.com. *Cosmonaut.* Online.
8. Britannica.com. *Creationism.* Online.
9. Britannica.com. *Economics.* Online.
10. Britannica.com. *Eugenics.* Online.
11. Britannica.com. *Fascism.* Online.
12. Britannica.com. *Frances Cornford.* Online.
13. Britannica.com. *Humour/Human Behaviour.* Online.
14. Britannica.com. *Intelligent Design.* Online.
15. Britannica.com. *Materialism.* Online.
16. Britannica.com. *Russia.* Online.
17. Britannica.com. *Satanism.* Online.
18. Britannica.com. *Transhumanism.* Online.
19. Britannica.com. *Victor Hugo.* Online.
20. Britannica.com. *World War 2.* Online.
21. Christianitytoday.com. *Charles Spurgeon.* Online.
22. Commonwealth.gostudy.net. *Astrophysicist Occupation.* Online.
23. Dictionary.co. *Transcendental.* Online.
24. Henrycenter.tiu.edu. *Who Was Jesus of Nazareth?* Online.
25. Idioms.thefreedictionary.com. *Out of the woods/Idiom.* Online.
26. Imdb.Com. *From Russia with Love (1963 film).* Online.
27. Imdb.com. *Judgment at Nuremberg (1961 film).* Online.
28. Llewellyn, Robert (1939) *How Green Was My Valley.* Michael Joseph.
29. Merriam-Webster. *Silver Bullet.* Online.
30. Nationalgeographic.org. *Uniformitarianism.* Online.
31. Nobelprize.org. *Boris Pasternak.* Online.
32. Poetryfoundation.org. *Rupert Brooke.* Online.
33. Spurgeon.org. *The Spurgeon Library.* Online.
34. Thenewatlantis.com. *The Folly of Scientism.* Online.
35. Wikipedia. *Amazing Grace/Song.* Online.
36. Wikipedia. *Astrology.* Online.

37. Wikipedia. *Astronomer.* Online.
38. Wikipedia. *Caltex*. Online.
39. Wikipedia. *Darwinism*. Online.
40. Wikipedia. *Dr. Zhivago (1865 film).* Online.
41. Wikipedia. *Dr. Zhivago/Novel*. Online.
42. Wikipedia. *Enrico Mussolini*. Online.
43. Wikipedia. *Extraterrestrial Diamonds.* Online.
44. Wikipedia. *Football Hooliganism*. Online.
45. Wikipedia. *Ford Model T*. Online.
46. Wikipedia. *Hedonism*. Online.
47. Wikipedia. *Henry Ford*. Online.
48. Wikipedia. *Ian Fleming.* Online.
49. Wikipedia. *Meditation*. Online.
50. Wikipedia. *Nazism*. Online.
51. Wikipedia. *Paganism*. Online.
52. Wikipedia. *Scientology*. Online.
53. Wikipedia. *Spiritualism*. Online.
54. Wikipedia. *The Bridge on the River Kwai (1957 film).* Online.
55. Wikipedia. *The Chronicles of Narnia (film series).* Online.
56. Wikipedia. *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Online.
57. Wikipedia. *Vera Lynn*. Online.
58. Wikipedia. *Victor Klemperer*. Online.

47

Join the Club!

"I'm not going to pay good money to join a club that lets in people like me."
[Groucho Marx, 1890-1977]

When I was about 5 years old in 1953, my father came home one day where we were living in Randgate, South Africa, with a large box of books he had picked up at a bargain table in town, i.e., all kinds of hardbacks, paperbacks, westerns, crime & detective novels, romance, discovery, history etc. My little brother HansS. and I sat enthralled at our kitchen table watching my mother repair the more worn ones and lovingly covering all the hardbacks in brown (manilla coloured) wrapping paper as if wrapping them in swaddling clothes. Our family loved books, and still do.

One of the plethora of books was one by the renowned author and Pulitzer Prize winner, Louis Bromfield (1896-1956) i.e., *The Rains Came,* published in 1937 and first made into a film in 1939 starring Myrna Loy, Tyrone Power, and George Brent; it was later nominated for six academy awards.

Nevertheless, this thick novel of a book, about some earthquake and devastating floods in Ranchipur, used to sit there on the shelf for years trying to persuade me to read it, but no matter how hard it tried, I could never bring myself to read it. At first, I was simply too young to tackle such a formidable novel; later I was simply too lazy to try. When I as a young adult out of school eventually came to try and read it, I covered a few pages but later gave it up for a bad job, not that there was anything wrong with Louis Bromfield, but because I was totally out of my depth ... I simply have not yet developed the intellectual gravitas and patience for it. At that stage, my usual fare used to be Zane Grey, Brian Aldiss, Isaac Asimov, Leslie Charteris, Ray Bradbury, Lobsang Rampa and maybe some Louis L'Amour here and there on the side. I simply never could get myself to read it and finish it ... period.

Now, recently, just before my brother HansS. died, the two of us were one day sitting at my sister's house in Vanderbijlpark when we started reminiscing about the good old 1950s days in Randgate when we were little.

"Remember that thick pink old novel, you know the one with the title 'The Rains Came'?" he asked. I nodded in the affirmative, and he said: *"You know, I could never read that book and finish it, no matter how hard I tried."* I laughed and concurred ... certain novels just had to be enjoyed as films. I was pleasantly surprised that my brother had also tried to read that book, as a child he never occurred to me as the 'accultured' type. The point is that we were both out of our depth; we modern, ignorant urban 'Neanderthals' had had neither the education, nor the intellectual capacity and spiritual sensitivity for books like that.

So, a few years back I, the eternal 'bargain books' sleuth, got myself a book titled, *I Shall Bear Witness,* the first of three volumes by Victor Klemperer dealing with his WW2 times in Dresden when the Jews were so mercilessly hounded, harassed and persecuted by the Nazi regime. Klemperer even has had to spend eight days in prison for forgetting a 'lights-out' injunction from the local authorities of which he provides a comic, light-hearted description in the book. But the one paragraph I will forever appreciate and cherish is when he, during WW2 and during the height of the persecution in months to come, decided to read *The Rains Came* by Louis Bromfield, which he sadly admits he has had a tough time to read. He writes:

> *"23^{d} June, Sunday. Between evening tea and cards, I now read out a couple of pages of Louis Bromfield's The Rains Came but I never get very far."* [Klemperer: 419].

"And that in the evening I read little drops of The Rains Came aloud ..." [Klemperer: 422].

The reason I appreciate his story so much is that it has made me feel so much better after my failure to read *The Rains Came,* for Victor Klemperer (1881-1960), a professor, was no ignoramus of a simpleton. If he could struggle with the reading of *The Rains Came* then why not I?

Victor was a cousin to the conductor Otto Klemperer, and first cousin once removed to Otto's son, the actor Werner Klemperer. In 1903 Klemperer converted to Protestantism for the first time, shortly thereafter returning to Judaism. Victor Klemperer attended several gymnasia. He was a student of philosophy, Romance and German studies at universities in Munich, Geneva, Paris and Berlin from 1902 to 1905, and later worked as a journalist and writer in Berlin, until he resumed his studies in Munich from 1912. Though not a religious man, Victor Klemperer needed a religious identity, as Jew, Christian or dissident, to support his academic career. He chose Christianity as being most compatible with his much stronger conviction of being German, and became baptised again in Berlin in 1912.[5] He completed his doctorate (on Montesquieu) in 1913 and was habilitated under the supervision of Karl Vossler in 1914. From 1914 to 1915, Klemperer lectured at the University of Naples, after which he became a decorated military volunteer in World War I. From 1920 he was Professor of Romance Languages at the Technical University of Dresden ...

Klemperer's diary was published in 1995 as Tagebücher (Berlin, Aufbau). It was an immediate literary sensation and rapidly became a bestseller in Germany. An English translation of the years spanning the Nazi seizure of power through Klemperer's death has appeared in three volumes: I Will Bear Witness (1933 to 1941), To the Bitter End (1942 to 1945) and The Lesser Evil (1945 to 1959).

He also published The Language of the Third Reich, a study on the language of the Nazi propaganda.

In 1995, Victor Klemperer was posthumously awarded the Geschwister-Scholl-Preis for his work, Ich will Zeugnis ablegen bis zum letzten. Tagebücher 1933–1945."

[Wikipedia].

References

1. Bromfield, Louis (1937) *The Rains Came*. Harpers & Brothers.
2. Klemperer, Victor (1995) *I Shall Bear Witness (1933-1941).* Berlin, Aufbau.
3. Wikipedia. *The Rains Came.* Online.
4. Wikipedia. *Victor Klemperer.* Online.

48

Why We Must Be Born Again

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,
teaching us that having denied ungodliness and worldly lusts,
we should live discreetly, righteously and godly, in this present world,
looking for the blessed hope, and the appearance of
the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.
[Titus2:11-13MKJV].

THINGS WE CANNOT CHANGE

Let's face it, there are things we can never change. For instance:

DNA

No matter how hard we try, we will never be able to change our DNA, that mysterious 'double helix' that determines who and what we biologically are. Even were we to bribe the lab technician to switch the specimen containers in which DNA samples are preserved, we will never be able to change our DNA; we are stuck with it forever. Let the transhumanists fiddle with our genes and bioengineer our DNA as much as they like, they will never change who we are.

Fingerprints

We cannot change our fingerprints, no matter how hard we would try. Yes, fingerprints may fade over time, but no effort of technological innovation or criminal engineering will ever change who we are. Our fingerprints are unique, whether still new, old or already faded.

Our True Identity

Let's face it, all the plastic surgery in the world will not change who we are, not even with a new, FBI facilitated ID card and a changed address. Unless some astonishing miracle happens, we are stuck with who we are ... forever.

Living with the Past

Having to live with an inglorious past can, for many, be a daunting challenge. After all, what to do with the painful failures, embarrassing moral and social indiscretions, or sins against others, against God and against the holy Heavenly Courts of Absolute & Infinite Justice? What to do with the crimes and misdemeanours of our reckless youth that still may be haunting so many today?

It is in times like these that the psychotherapist's admonition of*, "Don't you think the time has come for you to forgive yourself?"* sounds as empty and hollow as a brown paper-bag with the last donut left eaten by the dog. I have searched the Bible deep and wide but has yet to discover the scripture that authorises us to 'forgive ourselves'. If only we could change who we were ...

change our identity to be-come a different person with a past as pure, uncluttered, innocent and morally pristine as that of a new-born baby!

WE MUST BE BORN AGAIN!

The words of Jesus Christ's clarion call to Nicodemus still ring far and wide today*:*

"Do not marvel that I say to you, you must be born again."

[John3:7MKJV].

What does it all mean? It means that trying to change who we are would be of no avail and wasting time trying to reform ourselves would be worse than useless; what we needed was 'transformation', not 'rehabilitation'. In other words, we must be born again. The miracle of *spiritual regeneration* as taught by the Bible is that we can be born again into that innocent new person we clamour to be. Jesus Christ says: *"You must be born again!"*

STANDING ON THE PROMISES OF GOD

God, who cannot lie, has solemnly promised:

"Come now, and let us reason together, says Jehovah; though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be like wool."

[Isaiah1:18MKJV].

"But as many as received Him [Jesus Christ] He gave to them authority to become the children of God, to those who believe on His name."

[John1:12MKJV].

"So that if any one is in Christ, that one is a new creature; old things have passed away; behold, all things have be-come new."

[2Corinthians5:17MKJV].

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

[Romans6:23].

"And so it is written, 'The first man, Adam, became a living soul," the last Adam [Jesus Christ] was a life-giving Spirit'."

[1Corinthians15:45MKJV].

THE DOUBLE GUARANTEE OF THE POWER OF GOD TO SAVE

"And I [Jesus Christ] give to them eternal life, and they shall never ever perish, and <u>not anyone shall pluck them out of My hand</u>."

[John10:28MKJV].

"My Father who gave them to me is greater than all, and <u>no one is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand</u>."

[John10:28-29MKJV].

THERE IS A FOUNTAIN FILLED WITH BLOOD!

Recapping: In 1962, after years of wasteful, childhood confusion and blissful youthful ignorance, I finally, as a 14-year-old youngster in a small church in Virginia (O.F.S.), had the opportunity and privilege of kneeling at the cross as a hopelessly lost sinner and accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour of my life.

Although, however, my pastor (TienieC.), who had worked so hard in those days at explaining the Gospel and the truth and dynamics of Salvation to me, and my fellow-pupil at a local high school (JohanS.), have both since departed and it is no longer with us; and, furthermore, since this initial evangelical enthusiasm (the typical 'zeal without knowledge' of the young convert) had consequently diminished considerably by 1965 due to the pressures of young adulthood and the secular forces of society, it was again, only by God's grace, mightily revived in 1974 in my new hometown of Vanderbijlpark, and I have since never looked back.

Today I have no other option but to rest in the blood (sacrifice) of Christ and His work on the cross of Calvary (Golgotha) to deliver us forever from our objectionable, sinful (and sometimes even criminal) past with its many uncouth, youthful instincts, inclinations and behaviours.

It was all about our carnal *'demeanour'* ... the further we drifted away from God and His *Holy Word* (the Bible) *the meaner* we got. I am, however, also thankfully reminded of William Cowper's beautiful words:

There is a Fountain filled with Blood,
Drawn from Emmanuel's [JESUS'] veins.
And sinners plunged beneath that Flood,
Lose all their guilty stains!

(William Cowper, 1731-1800)

GOD CAN MAKE YOUR VALLEY GREEN AGAIN!

If I were asked to explain to the reader my temperament as far as my walk in faith is concerned, I would best describe it with the aid of a poem by a (late) dear friend of the family, Nancy Bouwer, which she must have penned especially for me during the late 1970s. Writers are a contemplative, melancholic lot of which many probably live their lives on the edge of sheer desperation. The poem:

LORD, KNOWEST THOU ME?

Nancy Bouwer

My Lord, knowest Thou me?
I have a leaning side;
A tendency to go astray
If Thou dost not lead all the way.
My hands are weak,
My heart doth faint
When evil does my soul assail.

Lord, should You find me, blindly groping,

Wouldst Thou just whisper, "Peace ... be still!"
For, I am often lost, so often lonely
On this my pilgrims' way, O Lord.
My leaning side doth need a helping hand,
Else I could enter Heaven's portals never
Or dwell o'er there with the immortals.

Lord, I would be strong for Thee,
Yet am I often weak and cannot walk alone;
Tis Thee I need!
Please lift me up, yes, lift me higher
Above the things I should not do ... yet do.
Yes, lift me higher still, dear Lord
O'er all the things I should have done
Yet oft times left undone.

O Lord, prop up my leaning side,
O Lord, let me in Thee abide.
Though I am weak, yet Thou art strong.
Let me lean on Thee ever on!
Be Thou my strength, my guide;
Redeemed, I could bravely walk with Thee
Through all Eternity.

In summary, I suppose this anonymous writer has probably said it best when he/she had written:

"When we stop chasing the wrong things, we give the right things a chance to catch up with us."

Be that as it may, maybe the reader has also arrived at a juncture in his or her life where he or she feels despondent, or irretrievably lost and beyond help. Perhaps his or her 'valley' had grown brown, parched, dry and ugly in recent years; but we can make our valley green again, irrespective of and notwithstanding our past (and even if we are in prison today) by simply coming to the Christ of Calvary to repent and accept Him as our Lord and Saviour. Jesus can not only salvage one's soul but also one's life. In due time He can make our valley grow green again. Here's the deal: God can redeem time, tears and trouble! The Bible teaches:

> *"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*
>
> [Isaiah 1:18KJV].
>
> *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son [JESUS], that whosoever believeth in him [JESUS] should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son [JESUS] into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*
>
> [John 3:16-17KJV].
>
> *"All that the Father giveth me [JESUS] shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I [JESUS] will in no wise cast out.*
>
> [John 6:37KJV].

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he [JESUS] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[1John 1:7-9KJV].

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

[Romans 6:23KJV].

References

1. AnswersinGenesis.org. *Creation/Answers in Genesis.* Online.
2. Apaonline.org. *The Problem with Scientism.* Online.
3. Bible.com. *Proverbs.* Online.
4. Bible.knowing-jesus.com. *30 Bible verses about Eternal Life/Gift of.* Online.
5. Biblestudytools.com. *ZOE/New Testament Greek Lexicon.* Online.
6. Britannica.com. *Albert Einstein.* Online.
7. Britannica.com. *Antichrist.* Online.
8. Britannica.com. *Education.* Online.
9. Britannica.com. *Empiricism.* Online.
10. Britannica.com. *Golgotha.* Online.
11. Britannica.com. *Halo Effect.* Online.
12. Britannica.com. *Hebrew Bible.* Online.
13. Britannica.com. *Iraq.* Online.
14. Britannica.com. *Kingdom of God/Christianity.* Online.
15. Britannica.com. *Luftwaffe.* Online.
16. Britannica.com. *Naturalism.* Online.
17. Britannica.com. Osama bin Laden. Online.
18. Britannica.com. *Palaeontology.* Online.
19. Britannica.com. *Psalms.* Online.
20. Britannica.com. *Saddam Hussein.* Online.
21. Britannica.com. *Sermon on the Mount/Bible.* Online.
22. Britannica.com. *Situational Ethics.* Online.
23. Britannica.com. *Slav.* Online.
24. Britannica.com. *Space Exploration.* Online.
25. Britannica.com. *Ten Commandments.* Online.
26. Britannica.com. *Trinity/Christianity.* Online.
27. Britannica.com. *Tutsi/People.* Online.
28. Christiancomment.org. *Interfaithism.* Online.
29. Christianity.com. *What is an 'Epistle'/What are the Epistles in the Bible?* Online.
30. Christianity.com. *What is the Biblical Understanding of the Wrath of God?* Online.
31. Crosswalk.com. *What is 'Salvation'?* Online.
32. Crosswalk.com. *What is Salvation?* Online.
33. Definition.net. *What does 'psalmist' mean?* Online.
34. Dictionary.com. *Creation.* Online.
35. Dictionary.com. *Nemesis.* Online.
36. Encyclopedia.com. *Higher Criticism.* Online.
37. Encyclopedia.ushmm.org. *Nazi Camps.* Online.
38. Gotquestions.org. *What is the Blessed Hope?* Online.
39. Gotquestions.org. *What is the Gospel of Jesus Christ?* Online.
40. Gotquestions.org. *What was the Levitical Priesthood?* Online.
41. History.com. *Judaism/Founder, Beliefs & Facts.* Online.
42. IEP.utm.edu. *Moral Relativism.* Online.
43. Investopedia.com. *Baby Boomer Definition/Years & Date Range.* Online.
44. Medicalnewstoday.gov. *Mental Health.* Online.
45. Membean.com. *Rootcast: Living with BIO.* Online.
46. Merriam-Webster. *Calvary.* Online.
47. Merriam-Webster. *Charity.* Online.

48. Merriam-Webster. *Creator.* Online.
49. Merriam-Webster. *Idiot.* Online.
50. Merriam-Webster. *Jerk/noun.* Online.
51. Merriam-Webster. *Lockstep.* Online.
52. Merriam-Webster. *Omnibus.* Online.
53. Merriam-Webster. *Sacred Cow.* Online.
54. Merriam-Webster.com. *Sow one's wild oats.* Online.
55. Mortality.org. *Human Mortality Database.* Online.
56. Nasa.gov. *Alpha Centauri/Triple Star.* Online.
57. Nasa.gov. *Messier 51/Whirlpool Galaxy.* Online.
58. Openbible.info. *What does the Bible say about Savior?* Online.
59. Openbible.info. *What does the Bible say about the Gospel?* Online.
60. Opnebible.info. *What does the Bible say about 'Living Water'?* Online.
61. Sciencebuddies.org. *Steps of the Scientific Method.* Online.
62. Sciencenewsforstudents. *What is I.Q. and how does it matter?* Online.
63. Sciencenode.org. *Tracking Cosmic Ghosts.* Online.
64. Space.com. *Milky Way Galaxy.* Online.
65. The Intelligencer.net. *Humanism's Tenets Cited.* Online. 2021.
66. Thefreedictionary.com. *Silver Bullet/Idiom.* Online.
67. Vatican News. *Abraham Family House.* Online. 2021.
68. Vocabulary.com. *Skeptic.* Online.
69. WHO.int. *Coronavirus Disease.* Online.
70. Wikipedia. *Abel.* Online.
71. Wikipedia. *Adolf Eichmann.* Online.
72. Wikipedia. *Adolf Hitler.* Online.
73. Wikipedia. *Astronomy.* Online.
74. Wikipedia. *Atheism.* Online.
75. Wikipedia. *Avant-garde.* Online.
76. Wikipedia. *Ayn Rand.* Online.
77. Wikipedia. *Ayn Rand.* Online.
78. Wikipedia. *Bertrand Russell.* Online.
79. Wikipedia. *Biblical Archaeology.* Online.
80. Wikipedia. *Cain.* Online.
81. Wikipedia. *Caligula.* Online.
82. Wikipedia. *Cambodia.* Online.
83. Wikipedia. *Canis Major Overdensity.* Online.
84. Wikipedia. *Catch-22/Logic.* Online.
85. Wikipedia. *Chariots of the Gods?* Online.
86. Wikipedia. *Cosmos.* Online.
87. Wikipedia. *Darwinism.* Online.
88. Wikipedia. *Dianetics.* Online.
89. Wikipedia. *Eternal Life/Christianity.* Online.
90. Wikipedia. *Galaxy.* Online.
91. Wikipedia. *GN-z11 Galaxy.* Online.
92. Wikipedia. *Gold Standard.* Online.
93. Wikipedia. *Gordian Knot.* Online.
94. Wikipedia. *Grigori Rasputin.* Online.
95. Wikipedia. *Heinrich Himmler.* Online.
96. Wikipedia. *Hermann Göring.* Online.
97. Wikipedia. *Humanism.* Online.
98. Wikipedia. *Intelligent Design.* Online.
99. Wikipedia. *Jacob's Well.* Online.
100. Wikipedia. *Jacob's Well/Bible.* Online.
101. Wikipedia. *Jeremy Griffith.* Online.
102. Wikipedia. *Jews.* Online.
103. Wikipedia. *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.* Online.
104. Wikipedia. *John of Patmos.* Online.
105. Wikipedia. *Josef Goebbels.* Online.
106. Wikipedia. *Josef Stalin.* Online.
107. Wikipedia. *Judas Iscariot.* Online.
108. Wikipedia. *Judeo-Christian.* Online.

109. Opembible.info. *What does the Bible say about Olive Tree?* Online.
110. Wikipedia. *Khmer Rouge*. Online.
111. Wikipedia. *L. Ron Hubbard*. Online.
112. Wikipedia. *Mao Zedong*. Online.
113. Wikipedia. *Mosaic Covenant*. Online.
114. Wikipedia. *Nero*. Online.
115. Wikipedia. *Nontheism*. Online.
116. Wikipedia. *On the Origin of the Species*. Online.
117. Wikipedia. *Patriarchs/Bible*. Online.
118. Wikipedia. *Paul the Apostle*. Online.
119. Wikipedia. *Pol Pot*. Online.
120. Wikipedia. *Political Correctness.* Online.
121. Wikipedia. *Pope Francis*. Online.
122. Wikipedia. *Principia Mathematica*. Online.
123. Wikipedia. *Prophets of Christianity*. Online.
124. Wikipedia. *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung.* Online.
125. Wikipedia. *Quran*. Online.
126. Wikipedia. *Religious Syncretism*. Online.
127. Wikipedia. *Richard Dawkins*. Online.
128. Wikipedia. *Richard Heydrich*. Online.
129. Wikipedia. *Rwandan Genocide*. Online.
130. Wikipedia. *Scientism*. Online.
131. Wikipedia. *Scientology.* Online.
132. Wikipedia. *Secular Humanism*. Online.
133. Wikipedia. *Sigmund Freud*. Online.
134. Wikipedia. *Soviet Union*. Online.
135. Wikipedia. *The Age of Reason*. Online.
136. Wikipedia. *The Blitz.* Online.
137. Wikipedia. *The Communist Manifesto*. Online.
138. Wikipedia. *The Holocaust*. Online.
139. Wikipedia. *Torah*. Online.
140. Wikipedia. *Ursa Major/Constellation*. Online.
141. Wikipedia. *Wehrmacht*. Online.
142. Wikipedia. *William Cowper*. Online.
143. Wikpedia. *Secular Ethics*. Online.
144. Wiktionary. *Moral Compass*. Online.
145. Youtube.com. *YouTube*. Online.

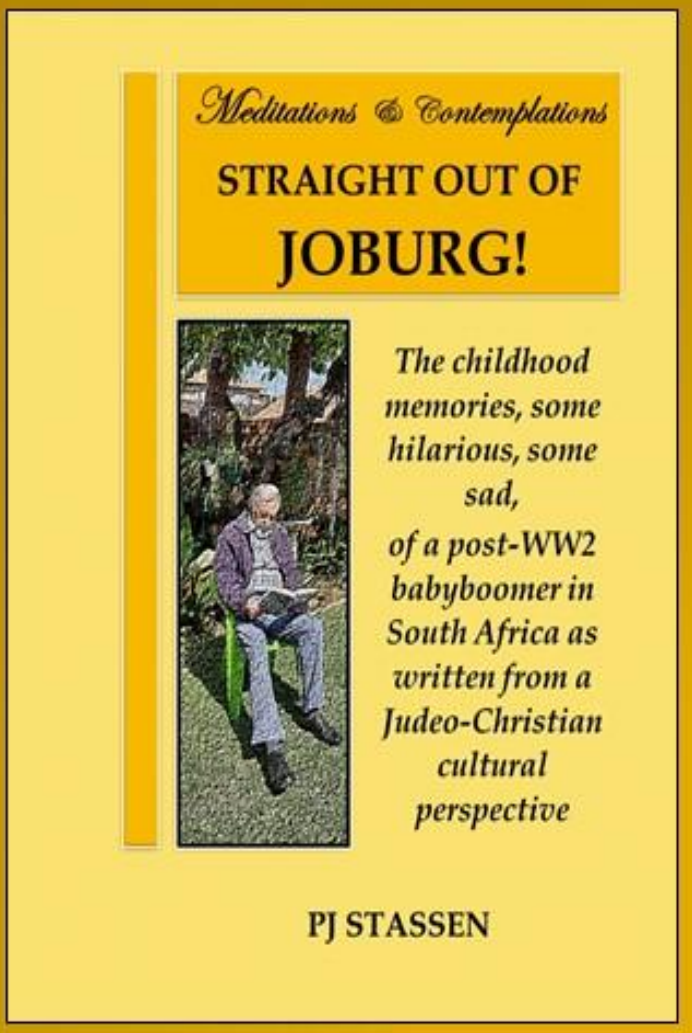
Bibliography

1. Andrews, Allen (1969) *Quotations for Speakers and Writers*. Newnes Books. London.
2. Bacon, Linda PhD (2010) *Health at Every Size: The Surprising Truth About Your Weight.* Accessed at http://www.lindabacon.org/haesbook/ [online] 2014. ISBN 1-935618-25-6. TX: BenBella Books. Dogma-busting book.
3. Benson, David V. (1967) *Christianity, Communism and Survival!* Regal Books & G/L Publications. California.
4. Brunton, Paul (1934) *A Search in Secret India*. Rider & Co., London.
5. Childers, Erskine (1999) *In the Ranks of the C.I.V.* Spellmount, Staplehurst. Kent. London.
6. Clarke, James (1969) *Man is the Prey*. Andre Deutsch Ltd. ISBN 586-034-579.
7. Conan-Doyle, Arthur (1900) *The Great Boer War*. First published by Smith Elder & Co. (London). This edition (1999) published by Galago Books, Alberton, South Africa. ISBN 1-919854-13-4.
8. Cornwallis Haris, Captain H. (1966) *Portraits of the Game and Wild Animals of Southern Africa.* Sable Publishers. Cape Town.
9. Gaither, William & Gloria (1974) *Let's Just Praise the Lord*. John T. Benson Publishing Company. Nashville, Tennessee.
10. Green, Lawrence G. (1947) *Tavern of the Seas*. Howard Timmins. Cape Town.
11. Herndon, William H. (1888) *Life of Lincoln*. Fawcett Publications Inc. Greenwich, Conn. (1969). This 1969-edition issued with a newly 'Revised Introduction' by Paul M. Angle.
12. Higgins, D.S. (1981) *Rider Haggard: The Great Storyteller*. Cassells. London. ISBN 0-304- 30827-7
13. Higham, Charles & Moseley, Roy (1989) *Cary Grant: The Lonely Heart*. New English Library, Hodder & Stoughton. London. ISBN 0-450-51612-1
14. Klemperer, Victor (1995, 1998) *I Shall Bear Witness: The Diaries of Victor Klemperer 1933-1941*. Phoenix Paperbacks. London. ISBN 0-75380-684-3.
15. Krauss, René (1944) *Old Master: The Life of Jan Christian Smuts*. E.P Dutton & Co., Inc. New York.
16. Krikler, Jeremy (2005) *The Rand Revolt*. Jonathan Ball Publishers. Johannesburg & Cape Town. ISBN 1-86842-189-9.
17. Lee, Sir Christopher (1977, 2003) *Lord of Misrule*. First published as *Tall, Dark and Gruesome*. This edition of *Lord of Misrule* published by Orion in Great Britain (2003). ISBN 0-75285-770-3.
18. Liberace, Lee (1973) *Liberace: An Autobiography.* W.H. Allen, Star Books. London.
19. Meredith, Martin (2007) *Diamonds, Gold and War: The Making of South Africa*. Pocket Books. London. ISBN 978-1-4165-3637-7.
20. Morris, Donald R. (1965) *The Washing of the Spears: The Rise and Fall of the Great Zulu Nation*. Jonathan Ball Paperbacks & Sphere Books Ltd. Johannesburg. ISBN 0- 86850-103-4.
21. Packenham, Thomas (1992) *The Boer War*. Abacus. London. First published in Great Britain by George Weidenfield & Nicolson Ltd. (1979). ISBN 978-0-349-10466-9. ISBN 1-86227-053-8.
22. Pretoria News (The). Newspaper, South Africa.
23. Reitz, Deneys (1929) *Commando.* Faber & Faber Ltd. ISBN 0-571-18082-5.
24. Rosenthal, Eric (1970) *Gold! Gold! Gold! The Johannesburg Gold Rush*. A.D. Donker (Pty) Ltd. Johannesburg (1970) ISBN 0-949937-64-9.
25. Smuts, J.C. (1952) *Jan Christian Smuts*. Cassell & Co. Ltd. London.
26. Warner, Philip (2006) *Kitchener: The Man Behind the Legend.* Cassell & Co. Ltd. London. ISBN-13 978-0-3043-6720-7/ISBN 0-3043-6720-6.
27. Wheaton, Timothy (1990) *Great Trains: Luxury Rail Journeys of the World.* Bison Books Ltd. London. ISBN 0-86124-670-5.

AUTHOR PROFILE

P. J. Stassen, born in 1947 in Randgate, South Africa, holds a B.A. degree in Industrial Psychology & Sociology (Industrial) from the University of South Africa. A former businessman who, after mandatory military conscription, spent the first 12 years of his life in 1966 in the field of retail (Textiles & General Dealer) in a family business begun by his father in 1964, thereafter worked at various other jobs eventually arriving in the fulfilling position of a corporate trainer with *Kumba Resources* (formerly *Iscor Iron Ore Mine*) in the Bushveldt region of South Africa during the years 1986 and 1997. At the time of his retirement in 2013 he was engaged in *Occupational Health & Safety Training* in the corporate environment on a contract basis for a Johannesburg company.

P.J. Stassen and his wife are both retired and live in Centurion, South Africa after having also served in their capacities as gospel musicians (pianist & organist respectively) in churches in two of South Africa's nine provinces, e.g., in places like Vanderbijlpark, Bloemfontein, Thabazimbi, Sinoville and Centurion.


Meditations & Contemplations
STRAIGHT OUT OF
JOBURG!
The childhood memories, some hilarious, some sad, of a post-WW2 babyboomer in South Africa as written from a Judeo-Christian cultural perspective
PJ STASSEN

"Let no one till his death be called unhappy.
Measure not the work until the day's out and the labour done."

- Elizabeth Browning (1806-1861)

MORE BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Christianity: Saviour on a Mission
Christianity: The Invitation Still Stands
Christianity: Fighting the Good Fight
Christianity: Keeping the Faith
Christianity: Confronting the Trojan Horse in the Church
Choosing the Right Side of History
Christendom Opnieuw Bezocht